MENNONITE LIFE

DECEMBER 1993

In this Issue

Dallas Wiebe is the Mennonite pioneer in creative writing in the United States. He has published his work widely in leading journals for many years, successfully finding a readership for his fiction, poems, and the *Cincinnati Poetry Review* he edited. He has won prestigious awards, including a Pushcart and a fiction award from the *Paris Review*. Currently, he is looking for a publisher for his novel, *Our Asian Journey*. In an interview in this issue he discusses his fascination with the Mennonite trek to Central Asia and the novel which grew out of that fascination. A selection from *Our Asian Journey* follows the interview.

Two poets are included in this issue. Jeff Gundy, who teaches at Bluffton College, consented to write a statement of poetics which turns out to be more evidence of Gundy's roving, probing mind; it makes a good introduction to his five poems. Because Jeff is a poet always in dialogue with God, his poems bristle with intellectual energy couched in colloquial language. Jeff's most recent book of poems, *Inquiries*, is reviewed in this issue by Keith Ratzlaff. Sheri Hostetler, a poet out of the Ohio Amish-Mennonite tradition, currently living in Oakland, California, speaks of writing as a spiritual and ethical practice. She has three poems in this issue.

"Too truthful to be called fiction, too selective to be called biographical" is how Warren Kliewer introduced the three sketches we have printed in this issue. The blend of fact and fiction won't matter to most readers, for these sketches, tests of the memory, will inspire readers to tests of their own! Warren has been reading his sketches to audiences in New York City.

Note also the reviews of Al Reimer's *Mennonite Literary Voices* by poet Julia Kasdorf, and of four plays by Kansas playwrights by playwright Lauren Friesen.

MENNONITE LIFE

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Dallas Wiebe:
Interview

Dallas Wiebe, a native of Newton, Kansas, and graduate of Bethel College, now looking toward retirement, has had a distinguished career as a writer (not that it's over!). Because Dallas has been a "pioneer" as a "Mennonite writer," I was curious to know his opinions on a variety of issues relevant to Mennonite interest in writing—issues such as writing preparation, influences, and publishing. Finally, he discusses in this interview his "Mennonite novel," Our Asian Journey, *a fascinating manuscript which came to Dallas over forty years ago but which he has only completed in recent years. Here he traces his research of the story of the Russian Mennonite trek to Central Asia and introduces his novel.*

Raylene Hinz-Penner

As an undergraduate at Bethel College, you were basically trained as a student of literature. While an undergraduate, did you think of yourself as a writer or a student of literature or both? Were there key literary or writing experiences which you look back to as formative?

I never drew a distinction between writing and the study of literature. I always thought them to be parts of a single discipline. When I studied a novel or a short story or a poem I always looked to the way it was written. I especially always looked to the kind of language used in the literary work. It always seemed to me that the reason one studied literature was to learn how to write, or, maybe, how not to write. When I started writing—I can't remember a time when I wasn't doing it—I wanted to write poetry only. I didn't do well at that. Then I "discovered" Saul Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March.* I had never seen any writer who could use his kind of diction. I probably learned most from Bellow about how to write fiction.

Describe your training for a career in writing as a graduate student at the University of Michigan. Who did you read and who were your mentors?

When I was at the University of Michigan, there was no writing program as such. In fact, writing courses were discouraged and disparaged. I took two writing courses; one was an independent study and the other was a summer course. Fortunately, the University of Michigan did have the Hopwood Awards. The awards were, and still are, large cash awards for creative writing. Students used to come there to compete for those awards. Even more fortunate for me was the fact that I met a lot of writers and I learned mostly from them. Some were graduate students and some were established writers: Keith and Rosmarie Waldrop, X. J. Kennedy, James Camp, W. D. Snodgrass, Donald Hall, Robert Bly. There was always a writer-in-residence. In the 1950s we were all studying the "confessional" poets. Not to mention the main writers: T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Charles Olson, W. B. Yeats.

What do you think of the current "controversy" over whether writers today in this country are out of touch with the lives of real people because of their academic isolation/insulation and the fact that they come out of university MFA writing programs?

I think it's a false controversy. It's part of American anti-intellectualism. It's part of a continuing suspicion of universities and colleges. Writing is, perforce, an isolated activity. University trained writers are just as much in touch with this world as anyone, in fact, maybe even more in touch. I was never in a writing program, although I have taught creative writing courses for some thirty years. My training was academic. I have no reason to defend the programs. But I think the writing programs have produced a lot of good writers. Many of those writers have had extraordinary experiences or have gone out and found them.

How and why did you begin the Cincinnati Poetry Review?

James Bertolino and I decided to start the magazine in 1975. It was co-founded and co-edited through the first nine issues. We paid for the first issue ourselves. After that we received some support from our English Department and later through grants. We began the magazine because there was no poetry magazine at the University of Cincinnati nor in the Cincinnati area. The idea was to promote, by publication, mainly local poets. And we wanted to do that in a national context. The magazine was set up to include in each issue about one fourth to one third of the contents by local writers. We defined local as being within about 150 miles of Cincinnati. The rest of each issue was to be made up of national or international work. After issue #9, I be-

came the sole editor and the publisher. We just published our twenty-fourth issue. A new editor and publisher will produce the next issue.

Why is Skyblue writing essays?

The character Skyblue is a persona. I let him write what I would not say in propria persona. He is now writing essays because he is getting old and he thinks he has some wisdom to impart to this world. He thinks that the logical end of a failed writing career is insight. He thinks failure is a good reason to justify trying to illuminate this world. His collected essays will be published in the Fall of 1994 by Burning Deck Press.

Would you classify all of your fiction as "historical fiction" or when and how did you come to be interested in a project like Our Asian Journey?

Most of my fiction is not historical. Some of the stories that are "historical" came as a result of my research for *Our Asian Journey*. I did a lot of reading in nineteenth century Russian history. I needed to get the context of my novel. From that research came the stories "At the Rotonde" and "Narodny Resprava." The idea for *Our Asian Journey* came to me when I was an undergraduate at Bethel College. For one of my classes we had to read C. Henry Smith's *Story of the Mennonites*. In that book Smith makes disparaging comments about the Mennonites who went to Central Asia in the 1880s. Then one of my instructors made snide comments about the same group. When I first read about the group, I was attracted to them because I am naturally attracted to underdogs. More than that, I realized that the journey was a great story. I didn't forget it. Then, finally, in 1975 I set to work. The title, by the way, is a translation of the title of several of the memoirs about the journey: *Unsere Reise nach Asien* or *Unsere Asienreise*.

Describe the research you did for Our Asian Journey.

First of all, one of the matters that made me not want to start the project was the realization of how much research would have to be done. Then Fred Richard Belk's *The Great Trek of the Russian Mennonites to Central Asia, 1880-1884* came out in 1976. The book did so much of the research that I thought I would have to do, so I owe Mr. Belk a great debt. His book saved me a lot of work. Most of my research was done in the Mennonite Library and Archives. Cornelius Krahn and John F. Schmidt were extremely helpful. I did not work on it full-time until 1980. I did what I could in whatever time I had available. Mostly I worked on it while visiting relatives in the Newton area. I read everything I could, both in German and English. I translated Claas Epp, Jr.'s book. I wrote parts of the novel as I studied. Then in 1980 I started working on the writing of it full-time. By 1983 I had a complete text. By 1985 I had what I thought was a finished text. Copies of the bibliography I accumulated are available for $500 (wait five years for delivery).

Is it fair to call Our Asian Journey a Mennonite novel? Does it make you a Mennonite writer?

The book is, of course, a quintessential Mennonite story. However, it is not written for a Mennonite audience. I thought of the book as a Mennonite story for non-Mennonites. The book is, in a way, an apologia. Because it is about a group of wandering "holy fools." I am fascinated by religious belief. I am a skeptic, an intellectual, a detached observer and I hope I have a sense of humor. But it fascinates me, as it fascinated me in 1949 or 1950, that a group of people could believe so thoroughly in the Scripture that they would sell everything and take off into the desert to meet God. What fascinated me even more was how they did it; someone had to feed and water those horses. Children were born, people died, young people got married. How did they pay for it all? What did they eat? My characters, I decided, would survive the journey, retain their humanity and not lose their faith. They were "Bible-haunted." They took their scenarios and language from the Bible. As my protagonist Joseph Toevs says at the end of the novel, "God loved us so much that He let us believe," and that while his wife Sarah is banging dishes in the kitchen and asking him riddles he can never solve. To think like this makes me, I guess, a Mennonite writer.

What do you think of the category "Mennonite writer?" Does it mean anything to you? Do you reject the label for yourself? Is it valuable?

I don't think about categories. They don't mean anything to me. Just as "historical novel" doesn't mean much to me. All novels are about events in history, in time, in the past. That's why they're mostly written in the past tense. I don't like labels. Let's put it this way; when working on *Our Asian Journey* I thought the audience would be a non-Mennonite audience. Now I realize that probably only Mennonites will understand what it's all about. Maybe only Mennonites can accept the idea that there is nothing mutually contradictory between milking cows and belief in God. As Joseph Toevs finds out, buying your wife a new pair of shoes is not condemning your soul. Maybe then I ought to call myself a "Mennonite writer." It may be the only way I'll find an audience for my book.

Your own comment?

In *Our Asian Journey* I tried to make of Joseph Toevs, my point of view character, a reliable, humorless, even stodgy religious man. He is almost incapable of hating, of getting angry, of seeing his own folly. But he is a "good" man and, I think, in our brutal world of "ethnic cleansing" and constant violence we survive because there are men like him. After all the wandering of his life, after the suffering he's seen, after the care he's taken for others, after never understanding his wife's riddles, he calls his life's memoir *A Short Sketch of My Life As it Reveals the Direction and Guidance of a Wonderful and Gracious God.* If he were alive today he'd find a publisher for my novel that is about him.

Our Asian Journey
Thyatira

Wednesday, October 8, 1884 (n.s.)

Wiebe and Klaasen got us going out of New York City sooner than expected. We left Castle Garden late in the afternoon of October 5. We were loaded on omnibuses for the ride to the railroad station. We drove past the huge new bridge, the Brooklyn Bridge, because Klaasen wanted to see it. We stopped and wondered at the shiny cables, the high towers, the ships passing underneath, and remembered the fragile bridges of our journey. What wonders God has provided to teach us humbleness.

We had a single immigrants' coach and stayed in it all the way to Chicago. Thirty-six hours. We left New York at 11:00 at night. We traveled on the NYC & HR Railroad. At noon the next day, the train stopped for half an hour at Niagara Falls. We got off and stared at all that water. We then traveled on the LS & MS Railroad through Cleveland and Detroit to Chicago. In Chicago we changed trains and traveled on a regular car. We left Chicago yesterday at noon and arrived at Crete, Nebraska, at 1:07 today and then to Beatrice. The B&M train arrived here in Beatrice right on time. 3:03 P.M. Sixty and one-half hours New York to Beatrice. Because Americans use a lot of initials, Sarah is already learning what they all mean: D.T., E.T.A., M.P.H., A.C., D.C., R.S.V.P., W.O.P. We were met at the train by relatives and friends who will "take us in"—an American phrase—until we can get settled. Sarah and I will stay with Heinrich Zimmerman. We will all go different directions. Four families will travel to Newton in a few days. We are told we'll take the B&M to Concordia, Kansas, and then the AT & SF to Strong City and then to Newton.

We were terribly disappointed when we arrived here. We expected to have a joyful reunion with the first group of immigrants from Orenburg. We learned that forty-eight of the first group came here about three weeks ago, that some of the pilgrims took different routes from New York and went to other places, that the first group had split up and gone to various settlements. Jantzen, who still smells like goat, was there to meet us. Four others came. Not even the Unruh girl was there to greet me and receive me. I had a little sermon prepared to give on the railroad platform. No one wanted to hear it, I'm sure, so I didn't mention it.

While our luggage was unloaded, I introduced myself to the engineer who was standing and chewing tobacco on the platform. I watched him spit three times. I said, "I'm Joseph Barnabas Toevs just come from Khiva." He said his name was Walter Garrison, stuck his finger in his mouth and flipped out a big brown wad that looked like a piece of fresh horse dung. He said the B & M trains didn't stop at a place with that name. I said it's in Central Asia as he took out a little round box, unscrewed the lid and put a pinch of something under his front lip. I asked him if he was a believer in God and he said, "I play baseball on Sundays." I turned away and said, "Salaam Aleikum."

Friday, October 10, 1884 (n.s.)

We left Beatrice last night at 10:30 on a Union Pacific train. The Unruh girl, who is working for Janzen from Berdiansk, came and said, "Good bye, Uncle Joseph. Remember the lilies from the Tugai and the tigers in the reeds." I gave her a kiss of peace on her already furrowed forehead. Sarah said, "Sense does not come before the years." We traveled overnight to Topeka and then boarded an A.T. & S.F. train for Newton. We decided to travel that route because it was faster than the one decided for us. It was 7:30 in the evening when we arrived and stepped out onto the wooden platform in this dry and treeless land. I thought we were back in Lausan.

I stepped down before the waiting people and I wanted to say, "Look at me. I am Joseph Barnabas Toevs just come from Turkestan. I have been to Orenburg, Orsk, Kasalinsk, Tashkent, Samarkand, Bokhara, Khiva, Ft. Embinsk. I have been to the desert according to God's will. We sold everything and went out. Strangers now stand and feed our flocks. The sons of aliens are now the plowmen and gardeners. We fled the shadow of this world with sorrow and heaviness. Like the Children of Israel we fled out of Egypt from the house of bondage. We were given tents for our safeguard. We were scattered among the heathen and given up as a reproach to them. We buried our dead along the path. We saw the low estate of our sanctuary when one of us was slain with the sword. We gathered the people together and came to this land."

But no. We stood on the wooden platform by the hissing train with the cinders falling on us. The wind blowing hard from the west. The dust clogging our eyes. Stood in the extreme heat for the Fall and listened to Suderman, while our stomachs cried out for food and our bowels cried out for release, give us a long and boring sermon about those who have gone astray and how they deserve forgiveness. Using Isaiah 65:17-19, he spoke of how we sometimes get in the spirit and are no longer skillful in all wisdom. He spoke of how in the pride of our arrogance we sometimes lose our cunning knowledge. He spoke of how God forgives us and how we must try to set aside differences in Christian love. He spoke of how leaving civilization and Christendom to go into a desert peopled by savage tribes might be an aberration of faith that yet we must accept the distress of our brothers in Christ and help them in forgiveness to recover their humility. God forgives all; so must we. God has given us new heavens and a new earth and the voice of weeping shall no more be heard. He asked us to join them in singing, "I am tired. I close my eyes. Father, keep watch over my bed. Send rest to those sick of heart. Close their damp eyes. Let those who still walk in darkness soon see the star like the Wisemen." We listened to the sermon and the prayers while the town dogs sniffed around our shoes. We sang their song and then all left separately for our temporary homes. As our group split apart for the final time on our journey, we all shook hands, looked to each other quickly and, in the babble of the charitable, rode away in farm wagons to sleep in clean, warm rooms. In soft beds. With our special secrets.

I was angry before I began my writing. I asked God for forgiveness. I told Sarah that I resented Suderman's preaching. I said that he's dull and talks too much. He did not use the Scripture correctly. I will teach him the economy of the desert. I will teach him the meaning of new heavens and a new earth. I told Sarah that I would have used "but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." She agreed when I said they sing as if their throats are filled with cream and butter and that we should have sung "Dearest Jesus, we are here to listen to you and your word; Turn our thoughts and desires to the sweet teachings of heaven, so that our earthly hearts will be drawn to you."

Sarah smiled while I talked. She began humming. I said, "Wife, why do you hum when you can sing? Didn't we sing for joy of heart when we walked in darkness? Didn't you lift up your voice like a trumpet and make the wilderness like Eden? Didn't the mountains and the hills break forth before you in singing and all the trees of the field clap their hands?" Sarah sang, "What's rustling in the straw? The goslings are barefoot and they have no shoes. The shoemaker has leather but no shoe last so he can't make the goslings any shoes." I nearly wept because my mother used to sing that lullaby in Wotzlaff where I was a child. When Sarah finished, I said, "Thank you. That was wonderful. You know my soul even better than I do." She said, "Chub chub, chub chub, Joseph. When the time comes, the song comes."

No letters yet from Khiva.

Saturday, October 11, 1884 (n.s.)

When I awoke this morning in my featherbed, Sarah was straightening up the room and taking care of the clothes from our trunk. With a loud voice of singing she declared, "O for a thousand tongues to sing," and I thought, "Why should we want the wilderness and the cities to lift up their voices when we have Sarah? Heaven forbid." She must know by heart every hymn there is. I rebuked myself and said a little prayer for forgiveness. Then lay in the soft bed of the minister and remembered how I had dreamed that the wild pigs were rooting through our trunks and eating our clothes. We stood by and cried out, but they would not move until Ak-Mamatoff came up on a dromedary and said, "There's water on the mountain." The wild pigs struggled up the steep incline. Sometimes they put rocks behind their back legs to keep from falling back down. They lunged forward and upward until they lay exhausted on the plateau where there was a spring of cold sausage and noodles bubbling up from the ground. I was standing there, a green Bible in my right hand, preaching to them from Genesis 11: "Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's

speech." The sun fell into the Crystal Sea. A light gray eagle flew up from the escarpment, pulling up a great black silk cloth until it clothed the heavens with blackness. A great light arose from the stars which were shaped like crosses. Our leader stood in the great light and held up a flaming right hand. The left held a shovel. As my heart meditated terror, he said, "Grease the axles. Water the horses. Buy soap. Who makes his living from smoke?" A cross made of butter melted down at his side. I reached into my pocket, took out a loaf of black bread and a knife, dipped up some of the butter, spread it on the bread and ate. He said, "Do this to me. I knew that the black cow had eaten the grindstone." A black goat came along, carrying a bottle of red wine between its horns. As I was pouring it over the sausage and noodles, I heart Jantzen in the high reeds, calling, "Esther, Esther." I awoke to, "Joseph, will you sleep all day? The man who owns the cow has to grab it by the tail."

After breakfast, we hitched Suderman's glorious, fat, black, team—Charlie and Buster—to a wagon and drove the five miles west into Newton. We went first to the post office. No letters for us from the Big Garden. I hoped to hear what happened after they rushed away from Lausan. I said a little prayer for Gerhardt, Christian and the others still in Khiva. There was a letter from Khiva to Suderman. From Quiring. It said only that their condition was bad. It said briefly—Suderman let me read it—that the bride community had been further purified and that all from Kansas and Nebraska would be welcome to return and join them in Khiva before the tribulation. Living quarters were being prepared for those who erred in vision and stumbled in judgement. The way is being made straight for them, a highway in the desert for them, before the overflowing scourge of the Antichrist. He asked for our prayers and here a little, there a little. Suderman looked at me and laughed and said, "Well now. So I have a perverse spirit, an unclean thing, in my house." I didn't think it was funny. My poor and contrite spirit was brought to silence.

After a visit to the land office and the courthouse, we drove back east of Newton and looked at an eighty acre farm north of Suderman's. It costs $1800 with a twelve percent interest on the mortgage, paid each half year, and a five percent commission on each $100. A lot. Suderman laughed at me again when I asked him if I should speak to the general about it. The soil is not as good as that on Suderman's farm in their settlement called Goldschar. I will consider the farm. I can borrow the money for the farm from the German Bank. The farm has a small house, a barn, a chicken house, a pig sty and no trees. After tomorrow I will have rested enough. I will get on with my own my Father's business.

Wednesday, October 15, 1884

Early this morning I hitched up my new team of Belgian geldings to drive into Newton. Team, wagon and harness for $250. We needed our first big batch of supplies on our new farm. Sarah wants twenty seedlings so she can start her trees this Fall. She wants fine, white sand for her kitchen floor. I led the big, gentle animals out of the barn into the cool morning and hitched them up as if they were pets. They're called "Harry" and "Buddie." Jumping Jehosaphat, what names. But they are gentle and strong and kick out viciously and accurately

Cattle market, Khiva

First Mennonite Church, Newton, Kansas

when the farmers' dogs nip at their heels when I drive them around on these rough dirt roads. When I drove into town, they trotted easily and I felt proud as we drove west towards the Santa Fe railroad tracks, the clumsy shacks of the settlers, the new courthouse rising, the hardware store, the new church on First Street. Across the flat and treeless prairie past the skunks and badgers, past the cottontails skittering away and the jack rabbits loping off into their high jumps.

I got the flour, bacon, dried beans, dried apples and dried apricots, the lard, yeast, coffee. Loaded the wagon full and left the horses hitched to the rail in front of Yost's store. I was astounded at the shovels, cultivators, barrels of produce, sacks of sugar, piled on sidewalk in front of the stores. Who needs all this stuff? I walked up Main Street, past the A.T. & S.F. station, past the town well, past the Bee-Hive Book Store and Hart's Bee-Hive Clothing House, past J. J. Krehbiel Wagons and Carriages and the Gayety Stables, M. A. Seaman, Prop. I was just going into Lehman's Hardware Store when I met the Ensz woman. I tried to sneak in but she saw me and walked up, smiling. No, sneering. She said in High German, "Well, well, uncle Joseph. So you've come to this place too. Now, is this your place of refuge? Is this your bride community? Is this your Solyma? Valley of the Carrots? Do you think you'll hear the last trumpet over the noise of the Santa Fe trains? What happened to Ebenezer? What happened to Khiva? Did that passenger train you arrived on drive through the open door?" I was abashed. I hid my face from shame and spitting. I was punished for my pride in my horses. I bowed my head. I went in, bought my hammer and saw, my nails and barbed wire. We are humble people. We are the quiet in the land. We are sheep. The clerk in the store spat tobacco into a can and told me that the Ensz woman and her husband had built and lived in the finest house in the town. On east Second Street. He said she serves high tea on Sunday afternoons. Whatever that is. I said Faspa is good enough for us. Whatever high tea is we laughed about it and I heard a man say, "I'm colder than a well-digger's ass." To a woman. It must be the democracy. And that man can vote for the president of the country.

Because there was no mail from Khiva, I decided to head home. When I untied Harry and Buddie, I slapped them extra hard with the reins to get them going with the heavy load of supplies. Their rumps dipped, their hoofs churned, the leather of the new harness whined, the wagon moved, I leaned forward and prayed for forgiveness because I had punished the dumb beasts for my sin. I did not feel unburdened until Buddie kicked a big black town dog and laid him out in a ditch.

When I got back to the farm, it was dark. I unhitched the horses, watered and fed them. Wiped them down extra carefully. Sarah had chicken and dumplings, Plume-Moos and coffee waiting for me. And a song, of course; "I am tired. I go to rest and close my eyes. Father, let Your eyes stay above my bed. If I have done wrong today, faithful God, forgive what I have done. Your grace and the blood of Christ make all injury right."

When I stopped in Newton today to look in the window of Joseph Steinkirchner's Palace Meat Market, I heard a man spit tobacco in the dust and say that the difference between a man and a dog is that if you feed a dog he won't bite you.

Saturday, October 18, 1884

After working on my sermon—I have been asked by the elders to speak before the congregation—I walked outside, walked into the blistering cold winds of the Kansas plains. Not as cold as the Buran. The elders want me to speak about my experiences as a pilgrim and a stranger in a foreign land. I think they are smiling to themselves. And I shan't speak about our desert journey. Why should I? I am not ready to fill my heart again with our suffering, our wonder, our submission to the providence of God. We pilgrims need to rest our souls as well as our bodies and the dusty winds said that. It came too much like the cold dust over Orenburg, the stinging dust of the Kizil Kum and the Kara Kum. It came too much like the Great Barsuk Sands. I will take my sermon from Proverbs 3:5-6 and John 12:26. I'll teach them to trust in the Lord and let Him direct their paths. I'll teach them that if they serve the Lord they will follow him and not a leaping deer on a farm machine. Follow Him even unto the desert, even through and out of the desert of the spirit, even into and out of doubt and confusion, even into and out of the dust and wind of Turkestan or of Kansas. This child of God will not be mocked.

And looked up into the great heavens over the great plains. Looked up and saw Draco, Auriga, Taurus, Aries, Cassiopeia, Andromeda and Cygnus just as I had seen them at Terekli, on the Syr Darya, in Kaplan Bek, in Serabulak, in Lausan, in the Ust Urt. And I knew that though I be

mocked for my pilgrimage, that though I be scorned for my suffering, that though I be laughed to derision for my trust in God that He will bend His stars down over us, like a hen protecting her chicks and say, "This child shall not be harmed."

When Sarah called me in out of the cold, I said, "The stars in Kansas are the same as those in Asia." She said, "What did you expect? Do you think God will alter the heavens just because you have moved to a new place? Do you think He will change the order of the firmament just because you have a new farm in a new land? God loves us and leads us, but you can't expect Him to subtract one mite from His glory just because your wagon and your horses, not to mention your wife, survived a great journey. You think that because you went forth into a further country where no Christian dwelt that He will stop the sun, darken the moon, fiddle with the stars?" The heavens declare the glory of God, and they sharpen the tongue of a righteous woman.

I was chastised rightly so I went out into our back porch. I opened the window and listened to the dogs barking over by Suderman's. Far in the distance. Carried over the plains by the winds. Dogs barking while I wept and prayed for my son Christian in the Big Garden.

Tuesday, January 6, 1885

This morning I hitched up Buddie and Harry and drove into Newton for supplies. It was and remains a bitterly cold day. The wind is from the north and there is dust in the air. The wind moans through the cracks around the windows and the doors. It rattles the windows in their frames. We are huddled around our cooking stove in the kitchen. Sarah knits and shivers. I write in my diary. We remember our solid brick house in Lysanderhöh. The brick oven. White sand on the kitchen floor. We were warm there.

This morning, Harry and Buddie walked and jogged willingly because of the cold and it took me only about an hour to get to the cemetery just east of Newton. On up First Street to the First Mennonite Church in the outskirts of town. I hitched the horses to the rail on the west side of the church on Muse Street and went in. It was cold, windows banging, dust on the benches. Copies of the *Songbook in Which Is Found a Collection of Sacred Songs for Universal Edification and the Praise of God* stuck in the racks on the backs of the benches. I sat in the center of one bench. I took out my little Bible and read again, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

My breath rose into the rafters as I prayed aloud for Sarah, my children, my land, my horses. Prayed aloud, my prayers ascending with breath and I looked into the rafters, out the arched windows, looked about for a man walking out of the desert, looked about for a pillar of dust, looked around for eagles flying, looked about for a tiger's roaring, waited for the dew to dampen my eyes so that I might see again from the circle of wagons the desert turned to vision, the pots banging in the darkness, the little organ filling the steppes with "There's a land that is farther away and shines out to lead us to it." What came was the smell of manure on my boots, an itch where my trousers were pinched together by my bent knees, a hunger in the belly, itching and burning in my eyes, thirst, a knowing that the cold wind was working the soil about for some purpose of its own. A sure knowledge that my days as God's pilgrim were over. So I took no thought for the morrow. I accepted my life as it has become. I waited for a voice from heaven to confirm my way and bless me. I heard a door bang. I rose from my knees. I looked about and expected to see Ak-Mamatoff, Amandurdi, the Unruh girl, the Ensz woman, Gerhardt. Outside, Harry and Buddie were anxious to be off because of the cold. I pushed my hat down tight and we jogged over to Main Street.

I tied up Harry and Buddie in front of the Empire Billiard Parlor and set out on my errands, dodging the globs of tobacco spit on the board of the walk. I purchased Sarah a copy of the *Russian Mennonite Hymn Book* at the Newton Music Company. I watched a freight train cross Main Street and worried about my horses. The train was loaded with pigs and much cattle. I stopped to find out what an undertaker is and who Kaufman and Hoefs are. I arranged for Sarah and me to have our picture taken at "Tripp for Fine Photos." I went into F. Claasen's Land Loan Insurance Office to find out what insurance is. I stopped at the German National Bank and paid fifty dollars on the $1600 I owe them for my eighty acres. I drove Buddie and Harry around by the new two story limestone jail and over to the blacksmith Wollschlager. He put a new shoe on Harry's right foot and checked all the shoes. I loaded some coal at the Edwards coal yards, got four new traces at Foy and Arnold's, headed for Warkentin's mill to get bran and oats. Such business. So much to do in this town. An Opera House, three shoe stores, five passenger trains a day, five churches, lamps along the street, a big clock over the sidewalks covered with kegs, rakes, coffee pots, lanterns, shovels, pitchforks, iron stoves.

I drove south along Main Street and across the tracks to Warkentin's mill. There, beside the tracks, I saw the miller Wiebe from Lysanderhöh. He was scooping wheat from a wagon, fast, bobbing up and down, the wheat flying in a steady stream into the side of Warkentin's big new mill beside the A.T. & S.F. tracks. The farmers who had hauled the wheat into town stood beside the wagons, out of the wind, spat tobacco and gossiped. I stopped, tied up the horses and walked up to see what had happened to our miller. He told me that he had come to Newton by way of Berdiansk, Kerch, Yalta, Odessa, LeHavre, Hull, Liverpool, Iceland, Norfolk, Memphis, Peabody, Lone Tree, Lehigh and one Winter in a wooden barn in 1883 while we were out in the desert. I said, "Doggonit, Isaac, where are all those places?" He said, "Along the way." He said he had no money, but that he wanted to go back to Lysanderhöh. When I asked him why,

he said, "Why can't they, by grab, have windmills here like they have in Russia? Look at all this wind going to waste. They want water power, or, heaven help us, steam."

As I drove east from Newton, I saw a dog lying in a patch of dead weeds beside the road. He saw me pass. He poked his head out. He did not bark or try to nip the horses. I looked back. He wagged his white tipped tail. I whistled and he followed me right into our yard, into our barn, lay down as if he belonged there, panted and wagged his tail some more. I pulled the burrs and thorns out of his coat, combed him, patted him and went about my work. The dog is mostly brown, He is about eighteen inches tall. He has large white spots on the head, shoulders and rump and the white on the tip of his tail. Handsome dog. Sarah said she saw the dog following me into the yard and decided that he should be named "Wilbur." I asked her why that name and she said that if she could have a son again and would have a son again she'd name him that. We're too old so I agreed with the name.

Today is Gerhardt's twenty-seventh birthday. Still no word from Khiva. I'd go outside and look at the stars and constellations, but it is much too cold. Before sleeping, I'll say a prayer for our leader, Gerhardt, my son Christian, and all the bride community still in the place of refuge.

While I was loading my supplies in Newton, I heard a man spit tobacco juice and say to another man, "I'm so hungry I could eat the last team on a wagon train."

Sunday, March 15, 1885

This morning we hitched up my new roan road horse Jack to my new four-seat buggy and drove into town for the Sunday morning service. Warm light breeze, everything greening up. Our first Spring in Kansas. Sarah and I arrived. We went in and saw that the altar was covered with daffodils, star of Bethlehem, hyacinth, purple iris. And we remembered. It is our twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. Suderman mentioned us in his tiresome sermon and held us up as examples of perseverance, patience, humility, piety. My son Benjamin nudged my elbow three times and I gave him a look of rebuke and after the church service a lecture on proper behavior. We sang, "I worship the power of love that was revealed in Jesus. Now I will no more think of myself, but immerse myself in the sea of love." Sarah wept and her chins trembled. She sang, looked down, shed tears, and watched them drop from her bottom chin onto her new and shiny black shoes. The Ensz woman said congratulations but did not shake our hands.

This afternoon my family, relatives and friends gathered at our house for pork sausage, chicken and dumplings, black bread, Zwieback, Vereniky, Apfel-Kuchen, Plume-Moos, Mohn-Kuchen, coffee, Kraut-Pirogy. My son Jacob said the blessing, Heinrich read the Scripture; Matthew 6:33: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." He spoke briefly how our special verse had led us through the world and brought us to this gathering in Kansas. He spoke well, because he spoke shortly, while Sarah wept again; I know she was thinking of Christian still in Khiva. Johann played a song on his violin; "Jeannie with the Light Brown Hair." When our love feast was over, we parted in prayer and into a sunset like those over the Kizil Kum, the Kara Kum and the Ust Urt Plateau. I expected the radiant skies to open. They didn't so I told Aganetha that her cooking was excellent and that if she continued to cook like that she would soon have a husband. Sarah sniffed so I told her she had done a good job planting the trees yesterday: two cherry trees, two apple trees, two plum trees, two peach trees and two apricot trees. The elms and pines she planted two weeks ago look good so far. Soon she'll have a whole forest around our house. And here in America we're not required by law to plant twenty trees a year. I've ordered Benjamin to water the trees every day. He hates to do it, I know, and says he doesn't want to be a farmer. He says he wants to be a telegrapher on the A.T. & S.F. When I asked him why, he said that the telegraph was as good a way as any to spread the word. I became wrathful and told him not to be blasphemous. He waters the trees, but not with a willing spirit. I complained to Sarah. She cocked her head and said, "Every mother has seven kinds of children."

Sarah told me this evening that Jacob's new wife Louise is expecting a baby, that Jacob plans to start a new house on his farm next week and that Aganetha has been speaking to Rudolph Yost, a grocery clerk in Newton—and a Lutheran. When I asked Sarah how she knew all these things, she glanced across her chins, sniffed and turned back to her crocheting. Hummed and rocked. I asked her if she had noticed the school children walking by each morning and evening on their way to and from the new school on the Newton road. She said she had and that she waited for them each morning. She said she sometimes gave them cookies for their lunches. I waited for more revelations, but none came. What the heck, when the time comes the answers will come.

Monday, April 6, 1885

How can you think of a Kansas dirt farm as a New Canaan, a promised land, a place of refuge, an open door? If you find an open door here it means that your horses and cows are loose. If you open a door here about the only thing that passes through is dust. If you leave a door open a tornado will pass through and remove your furniture. Whoever promised this land to someone must have been joking. Those who took refuge here must have been lost. Newton, Kansas, is a New Canaan for coyotes. If the prophet were to write his book here he would not say we are the small dust of the balance. He would say that we are the long spit of the tobacco chewers.

Some mornings, in the darkness, I hitch up Harry and Buddie to the wagon or Jack to the buggy and point

them eastward. Sarah comes out, wiping her hands on her apron, adjusting her covering, retying the strings under her chins, and we sit on the wagon or in the buggy and watch the sun rise as it rose so many days on our desert journey. We listen for the camel bells. We watch for a comet. We get off the wagon or out of the buggy. We cook, we sew, plow, harrow, clean and wash, plant wheat and gather eggs, study the Bible and pray. Our tribulation now is that we know perfectly well that if you want to find God you don't do it by walking back and forth on the same field. You don't find a promised land while sitting and milking cows. You don't enter a New Canaan while scooping manure. You can't find an open door in the middle of a wheat field. You can't find a place of refuge while harrowing clods. You can't be like the Patriarchs while riding in a railroad train. Moses didn't cross the waters in a steamship.

When we drive into Newton for our church services, we go westward. When we drive home we go eastward. I let the horses turn into our lane because they know the way to their barn. I let them turn themselves lest I draw out my whip, slap them on their rumps and say, "Go on to the Ural River. Go on to the Irgiz, the Syr Darya, the Keles, the Aris, the Zeravshan, the Amu Darya, the Chegan, the Emba, the Ilek. Go on to Orenburg, Orsk, Karabutak, Irgiz, Terekli. Go on to Kasalinsk, Ft. Perovski, Turkestan, Tashkent, Kaplan Bek. Go on to Samarkand, Katakurgan, Serabulak, Ebenezer, Karakul. Go on to Solyma, to Shari-Sabs, to Petroalexandrovsk, Kipchak, Lausan, the Big Garden by Khiva or Kungrad, Ft. Embinsk, Aktubinsk, Orenburg. But no. Harry and Buddie, or Jack, turn in and we come to our small white house. Benjamin and Elizabeth jump out and race to the pumping windmill for a drink of water. Johann plays his violin. Aganetha writes a letter to her Rudolph. Heinrich and Jacob drive in in their new buggies and with their wives. All are happy to be home. They are happy not to be sleeping in a wagon or in a tent. They are happy for china plates and solid leather shoes. They are happy with hot Zwieback and warm bread, fresh butter and Mohn-Kuchen. They are happy and I feel good for it all.

Then I think that Harry, Buddie and Jack may be the smartest things on this farm. They don't worry about salvation and sin. They don't worry about dying, judgment, the afterlife. They don't journey out to escape tribulation. They don't look for open doors, places of refuge, ascending into heaven. They're satisfied with their barn, with fodder, oats, water. They don't argue about the meaning of the Bible. They don't stop speaking to each other because they don't agree. They don't split up into separate churches because some think baptism should be by immersion and some think it should be by sprinkling. They don't sit around and try to predict the day of their future sorrows. They don't sell everything and go out to a desert land to look for what they have no idea. When Buddie and Harry roll in the dirt after the harness has been taken off them and when they shake the dirt from their backs, that's heaven enough for them. When they come in from the field and can shuffle their noses in the cold water, stick out their necks and drink long and deep, they're in their Valley of the Carrots. They're in their Solyma. Their open door leads right to a manger full of feed and that's all they need. This is their bride community, their Philadelphia. When they pull a wagon or a plow it is their time. When they eat, drink and foal it is their time. Their time is at hand all the time. Maybe we think, read and pray too much. Maybe we should look to God's creatures and be satisfied. I've got to quit all this scribbling. Sarah says I should take up chewing tobacco or dipping snuff. She says that the men who do that don't sing, pray or even think at all.

Wednesday, April 8, 1885

Tonight I listened to the children as they practiced for Sunday. For the first time they sang in English. They sang, "O have you not heard of that beautiful stream that flows through our Father's land? and "Work, for the night is coming when man's work is done." Now Sarah wants an English hymnal so she can learn all the songs in English. When will all this stop? How much more can we change?

Friday, April 10, 1885

Here in America they say that a happy woman is the spring of joy. By golly, today the waters ran out in great abundance. It began this morning at milking time. When Wilbur followed me home and Sarah named him I didn't have the heart (an American phrase) to tell her that Wilbur is female. When I went out to milk Bessie and Rose I found Wilbur lying in a corner of the room where we keep our loose hay. He had seven pups. They're mostly white, with brown spots here and there. I finished milking and went in and told Sarah about the newborns. She wiped her hands on her apron, sniffed and shed tears. Then into the bedroom. Knocking and banging about. Came out with her white wife's cap, strings tied under her chins. Off with the apron and out to the barn. I stood in the open door of our back porch, watched her sit in the hay, cuddle the pups, stroke Wilbur and sing, loudly, "Oh how blessed are the souls that are wedded to Jesus so that his breath blows through them and makes their hearts with earnest desire always walk only in his love and presence." There must have been jubilation in heaven when the angels saw the happiness of Sarah sitting among the firstborns in our new home. Our whole house seemed filled with joy that streamed from the fullness of my wife's heart—while Bessie ($27.50) stuck her nose out of the open barn door, walked out, Rose ($29.15) right behind her.

Later Suderman drove by and left off a letter. He had been in Newton and brought it out to us. It was from Christian in the Big Garden in Khiva. Their colony is now called Ak Metchet, White Mosque, because of their new white church. He and other men are working for the Khan of Khiva, laying parquet floors in his palace. The Khan says Christian and the others are cunning workmen. Sarah sat on the steps of our front porch in the warm spring sun.

Light flowing from her cap and tears. Shining out in the light breeze from the southwest. Reading the letter over and over.

Later in the afternoon I saw her standing by her new garden near the excuse me. Her white wife's cap bright against the black dirt. Her hands folded over her fat stomach. In her new shoes and the clods up to her ankles. Turning to the west, she went to her newly planted trees. She stroked them and talked to them. I know she sang for them in English. "Till my raptured soul shall find rest beyond the river." The words and the melody drifting away to the east.

Friday, June 26, 1885

Today is my forty-seventh birthday and my first birthday in this nation of tobacco spitters. I'm twelve days older than forty-seven because of the calendar change, but I'm sticking with (an American phrase) my right date. I mark the date because I'm bewildered by Sarah. She's been pouting and sniffing all day. While I write she is sitting in her rocker, rocking fast and knitting. I know she's upset because she jerks the yarn around the knitting needles and around her hands. Her fat feet strike the wooden floor hard as she sends me one of her womanly messages about something I've done or not done and something I'm supposed to realize without any words being said. But by jiminey, when I asked her what was the matter, she sniffed through her raised nose, adjusted her black wife's cap, retied the ribbons under her chins, looked out the window to the east and said nothing. I think she's been reading my diary again. She probably read about Wilbur. I've got to quit this scribbling. Maybe I've written too much already. Maybe I should write a book on how to care for horses on the Ust Urt Plateau, how to repair wagons in the Kara Kum, how to interpret Scripture, how to preach, pray, baptize, catechize, bury.

I think I eat too much. Heck's fire, Sarah's right; "A full belly is deaf to learning." Maybe I have nothing to write anymore. But how will I remember? How will anyone know what happened if I don't put it down? What will my grandchildren say when I tell them my past has passed away? Someone must write something down. Can I count on some Newton farmboy knowing enough to look at my diary and my letters and say someone must know about this? Would a college man be interested in my life? Would an educated man ever care about Sarah? Could anyone ever have the learning, patience, understanding, charity to care about our great adventure in Asia? The historians in their arrogance would never care. Already our neighbors make fun of us. Bier is called "Khiva" Bier—right to his face. I see no evil in my scribbling. I see that my diary is the story of a simple man with a wife who couldn't be understood by all science. That's all right, Sarah. By gum, peace be with you. Don't be angry when you read this.

No letter yet from Gerhardt.

Sunday, October 25, 1885

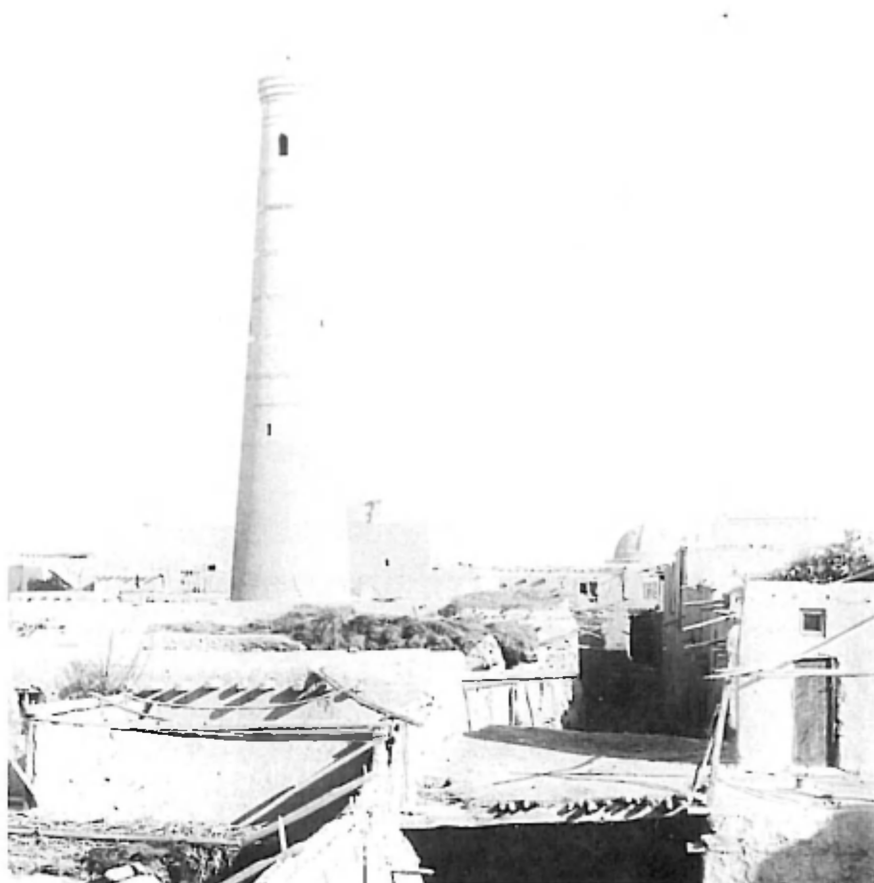
Last Wednesday evening I was elected, after great turmoil, an Elder of the First Mennonite Church in Newton and today I gave my inaugural sermon. I used I Chronicles 23:25, "The Lord God of Israel hath given rest unto his people," and John 6:55, "For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed." Even though

Ak Metchet

there was a dog barking outside an open window, I felt inspired as I spoke and I thought it was one of my very best sermons. The church filled with piety, holiness, grace and peace as I spoke. When we sang, "Preach the word with power; enter the narrow gate! Our Savior Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life," I thought to look into the balcony and see a great stag looking down upon us. I thought I would see a golden cross between his full antlers. I thought an eagle would rise over our church and fly up into the sun. I thought a great wind would rush from the mountains. I thought I would see Him enter and lay His hands upon us. I said to myself, "Now, now Joseph. Chub chub. Enough. Even so, come, Lord Jesus." After the closing prayer, I stood by the front door and shook the hands of the departing congregation. Sarah was radiant in her new white wife's cap, her new black dress and her new black shoes ($1.95). The Ensz woman left by the back door so she wouldn't have to shake my hand and welcome me to her church.

After the greetings, I was surprised to see Riesen, who had gone to the Big Garden. I asked him what had happened and he told me that he and his family had just arrived from Khiva. He said the bride community had little ground for growing things and that the men were working in the city of Khiva, doing carpentry, making glass and tile. He said that in Ak Metchet the leader was preparing for the tribulation that would come soon. He forces his followers to dig, hammer, saw, every evening and every weekend. Even on Sundays. They, he said, are building small mud huts to house the multitudes they expect to join them before the last days. Riesen says the leader does no work and expects us to return and will welcome us back. I asked about Gerhardt and he said that Gerhardt was working five days a week in his shoemaking business in Khiva, that he had adopted a boy, a Tekke Turkoman, an orphan of Geok Tepe, and was training him to make shoes and read German. He said Gerhardt and his son live in a room in the back of the shop and that Gerhardt returns to Ak Metchet and his small house there only on weekends. He refuses to help with the hammering, sawing and digging. Gerhardt, he said, says little, lives alone, reads books and smokes his waterpipe.

As he was leaving, Riesen turned back and said that my son Christian was betrothed to Theresa Kopper, something we did not know. As we drove home, I told Sarah about the engagement. Tears, sniffling, three chins quivering. She took my handkerchief out of my coat pocket, blew her nose on it and put it back. I slapped the reins smartly against the necks of Harry and Buddie and urged them to go faster, "Doggonit, Sarah," I said, "please. No more." She tilted her head back, her little brown eyes glistened behind her bulging cheeks, looked down her nose and said, "The servant of the Lord is supposed to comfort a suffering woman." I smacked Harry and Buddie across their rumps with my whip. They understood. They know that voice. Now, by jiminey, this servant of the Lord is learning patience, longsuffering and humility while pots and kettles bank about the kitchen, while wood is slammed into the stove, while doors thunder shut, while I listen to "Thanks to the Lord who fills the land with joyous gifts; all that we have comes from the hand of the Father"—shouted through the steam and stench of the cooking Borscht.



The high tower in Khiva

Some Words on Poetry,
Band Camps, Guitars, Gifts, Transgression, Community, Mennonite Art, Etc.

by
Jeff
Gundy

Where do poems come from? For a long time I thought my past was so boring that there wasn't much to write about in it. And my current life, more or less placid, ordinary, small-town, is not running over with "material" in the old sense of traumas, divorces, madness, etc., either, though it is filled, pressed down and running over, with things to do, with stuff both physical and otherwise. What's happening, right now, can lead off in so many directions . . . Right now the band campers are practicing outside my window on a hot morning in August; my favorite part is the way they've learned to yell "Gather up!" on a signal from the director, all together, and then be quiet and ready to play. When they actually start in, of course, it's just the usual loud, clumsy, insufferable stuff; band music is so obnoxious and wearying to me even at its best that I've never understood why anyone would invest so much time and effort in learning to play it. I know, this is not a majority viewpoint. I *do* wish my kids would be so obedient. But I'd be worried if they were.

I heard the poet Robert Haas say recently that the work of poetry is to keep alive our capacity to respond to experience. He's too smart to be wrong. But I might add that the job of poetry, and other imaginative writing, also includes retrieving experience that is threatening to vanish, unrecorded, unacknowledged; re-imagining experience that is already lost; and recording unconventional, unordinary, responses and reactions.

Mennonite writers have taken up all these tasks, and it's exciting to see their skill, craft, and passion. We share many things—as do all human beings, no matter how much we natter on these days about diversity and all that—but what's most exciting for me is that little nexus where identity and difference meet, where I recognize both what's common to the writer and me and what's been (until now) unknown to me because it's someone else's experience and language, not mine.

That gift of connection enlarges and deepens my world, makes me more able and willing—I hope—to overcome my natural state of stingy grumpiness and respond to the people around me with the generosity and understanding they deserve. Yes, Mom, poetry is *good* for you, or so I think on my better days.

To be a poet is to go through the world trying to stay alert, intermittently at least, for the signs and wonders and little nudges and strings of words that are the world opening up, that are the manifestations of whatever it is that's larger and wiser and more mysterious than our pitiful little selves. And they take shapes of all sorts, mostly having only marginally to do with what the more doctrinally nervous consider pure, good, righteous, etc.

Many of my best readers and critics and friends are Mennonite or have some Mennonite connection. On the other hand, most Mennonites—most people, period—are either indifferent, intimidated, or mildly hostile to all poetry, mine included. I hang onto the model, though, of community *within* society—of a supportive network that exists in the midst of mass culture, and despite

neglect and hostility. William Stafford hints at such a thing in poems like "Serving with Gideon" and "An Oregon Message." In my experience such networks are "nested" in complicated ways—thus I identify with Mennonite writers/intellectuals within Mennonites as a whole, with some Mennonite writers more than others, with Mennonites and poets among Americans as a whole, etc.

This sense of community is more loosely knit (and General Conference?) than some—certainly than the repressive patriarchies *Peace Shall Destroy Many* and Di Brandt's poems, but more so than John Ruth's Pennsylvania version, too. I've come to think of community in terms of frontiers and edges, as well as borders and boundaries. The main job of certain members of the community/society—college presidents, some pastors, most deacons, band directors—is boundary maintenance, teaching cooperation and obedience, preserving the center of the group for the next generation. But the job of others, including writers, includes reconnaissance and exploration and reporting back—from the borders and beyond.

We start and end in mystery, after all, and what's in between is mostly none too sensical either. Poetry may be a stay against confusion, as Frost said, or a way of living in the confusions, a raft to carry us through them. My poems tend to come out of intersections, knots where two or three little pieces of the big world come together for me, and those pieces may come from the literary world, family life, politics, music, sports, whatever of the welter I'm most struck by at the moment. I never played in the band, but was "in" assorted folk/rock groups through high school and college. We weren't often good, but we argued out for ourselves what songs we would sing, who would lead and who'd try harmony and who'd take the breaks. Then there are ancestors of the Ropp family, who gave money for the building I'm sitting in right now, who stood firmly with the Amish bishops who came to Illinois in 1873 to cast Joseph Stuckey from the fold for his refusal to excommunicate Joseph Joder for his universalist poem. . . it's a long story, but worth hearing.

I like William Stafford's idea of the poem as exploration, as free travel into realms that we make even as we discover them, through the gift of language. The Word, big or small w. Andrew Hudgins described the poems in my book *Inquiries* as filled with "theological curiosity," a phrase I like. Talk about "Christian poetry" suggests pompous pieties of the sort we have in plenty already. On the other hand, I once found myself writing in a notebook, "All I am really interested in is God." The best poems, I think, have some of the qualities of Jesus's words: a combination of humility and moral urgency, a weird sense of humor, an attraction to the kinky otherness of the truth and an appreciation of the need to approach it slantwise, lest we all go blind.

Poetry also allows for (relatively) nonviolent resistance to group-think and for claiming a certain distance from the crowd, which all of us need and some of us even deserve. The band campers are paying good money for the right to make thunderous sounds outside my window, but I'm here too, after all. Why does it seem to be only the girls I hear saying "Gather up!" so obediently? Are the boys just muttering, sullen? In high school, and still today, I would have walked barefoot on hot rocks before I marched around in a goofy uniform with a trumpet . . . mainly, instead, I sat alone in my room playing Dylan and the Beatles on guitar. I'm still not troubled that I never learned piano, either. Last year we inherited a beautiful old guitar from my wife's grandparents. This spring I bought a 12-string, and a book with the words and chords for 1200 songs, old and new, sardonic and sacred. The tunes and the words keep changing, and so do the instruments, but the singing goes on.

Worms

The worms are out and flat on the sidewalk, most of them motionless but not clearly dead. If the kingdom is upside down, how deep does it go? Far enough to drive out the earthdwellers, the sane quiet ones who need only darkness and dirt? Where is the throne, what sort of subject are we, how do we defend our borders, or is it that we need to break in? Well it's not just personal, that's for sure. The sidewalks are hard and cold but you can catch your breath and hunker, you can hope.

Sometimes you've got to make a move. Nothing was dirtier than pigs, yet the prodigal boy not only treated his father like a dead man but slept with them, craved the husks they ate. So the father does what, after his buddies have laughed at him for a year? He gives the kid all eight blessings, hugs and kisses and robe and the ring and the shoes and the good son's fatted calf, thus proving that you might as well go wild, might as well trash everything, God will love you so much when you change your mind.

What are these stories, anyhow? They leave us slack and defenseless, crippled and brain-shocked, dreaming the bones. Samaritan women were treated as menstruants from birth; if one walked through the village, the whole place was in for ritual cleansing. The priests and Levites learned not to touch a dead person, even with their shadows. Can you blame them for passing by? The real story is that love is dirty, like the black grit that fell from the eaves all over me as I tried to nail down the tin that I hoped would keep the squirrels out, just for you. And I had modern plumbing, soap and pumice, and a liberal education.

It's hot or cold everywhere today, lightning blitzed the computer again and the provost says the system is set on random. Ah let's ponder foolishness and slavery, good guys and surprise, tales that bend the categories. Love is expensive in several ways. How many shadows have I noticed lately? They have something to say: it is presence, not absence, that puts us in the dark. Here comes the kid, home from the big adventure, reeking of hog manure and malnutrition, squishing worms with every step. He only wants to be a servant. There's a shadow between us.

"Worms" by Jeff Gundy appeared first in *Re-Visions and Re-Interpretations*, ed. Charlotte Pressler and John Stickney (Poets' League of Greater Cleveland, 1993).

The Snakes Inside Your Head

So Joel and I are heading down the street when he
says You know, Dad, your head has two rooms inside.
I say Oh? and What's in there? and he says, Two
snakes looking out. Where'd you see that, on TV?
No! I saw it in a dream one night. Ah, I say. I
drop him off and walk home, puzzling over snakes and
what they might be doing, in my head, looking out.

> One snake sees only bones, hard lines
> and splinters. It moans is this all,
> why not then, might as well. It doesn't cry,
> it builds beautiful machines for opening
> and closing, for breaking things far away.
>
> The other snake weeps all the time
> for bruises and bumps, for the dead leaves
> soaked and dark, half dirt already.
> It strings long crafty skeins of angst
> and words wherever it can reach.
>
> And the snakes talk between their rooms,
> they kiss and fondle, argue and agree
> to dream the same dream of the child
> who will save them, who will make
> what is needed, who will love
> what is real and be good at it too.

Next day I ask again, Joel, what about those snakes?
Not snakes, he says, worms, and not looking but just
sleeping, just lying there. Two little worms, and in
one room, not two. He laughs easily at me, so greedy
to know, so slow to understand how fast it changes.

Big Dog and Little Dog, or Where Is God

1.
It's a day for geese to stand
two by two in the shallows,
a day for rest and talk,
a day for mud to start drying.

2.
Don't you wonder sometimes
why anyone would buy your act,
how it is the angels haven't
struck you from the list
as just too flat and unattractive
to keep feeding?

3.
Once I started and stared
upward, then at my hands.
Tine lines, whorls, hairs
precise and insignificant.
Flex and mysterious obedience,
strength, fatigue. God, I said.

4.
It's a question of looking,
of forgetting the little wounds
and petty complaints. Did you see them?
The winter cardinal, across the street
and into the snowy tree.
The new neighbor's pets, and
my son explaining happily
that the big dog is *younger*
than the little dog.

5.
A man without God
is a stump with no preacher,
a tree with no pillow,
a beggar with no street.

6.
It's deeper meaning. It's between
the lines. It's hidden, like
groundhogs, this is just the messy dirt
and the hole your horse
can break its leg in.

7.
My mother though it was a spider
dangling there at the top edge
of things. She brushed at it,
squinted and blinked. No luck.
She drove to the specialist
who told her to get used to it
poised there like a small
black emblem of books and poems
she has not read but
will learn to understand.

8.
When I touch my key to the lock
in the darkened hall, a delicate,
tiny blue-white spark often flashes,
and each time I am reassured.
No. Reminded.

9.
Yesterday my son told me of the great
blue heron that rose up from the creek
as he was riding out to soccer practice,
how big it was, how close beside him,
how it hung there, five seconds at least,
he said, waving his arms and hunching a little,
trying to say how it felt, so close
to something big and wild and strong
and flying up beside you.

10.
The big dog is younger than the little dog.
Where is God? In a pebble, maybe,
or a feather, or a wisp of the True Cross.
In a spark that floats
right through your hand.

Morning with Visitor

"Every Angel is terrible."
-Rilke, *Duino Elegies*

And on this day the Lord has made
I want no angels less than holy,
none of Rilke's aesthetic ciphers,

no postmoderns as stylish and empty
as video games. The preacher claims
that the message from the man at the well

is that every place is holy,
that while Joel dumps the Legos
on the hard bench and Ben scrawls

intently with his markers God is here,
among us, as I hush and threaten them,
as I write on the back of the hymnal.

Is some winged creature flapping here
invisibly, hot to change my life?
I prick up my ears, puzzle

what more attention I can pay.
The sermon's nearly over. Ben has drawn
a man with a brown and green face, a cap

with bells on the peaks. *What is it?*
he demands. A clown? An angel?
No—a joker. Do you want it?

Riding

I'm awash in the mush and grace of words,
the old drive of lexicon, the magic
of public syntax. The preacher confesses
his struggle with the passage assigned
but I wait easy, sure something will come.
He ticks off his problems and slides
into a detailed list of the torments
of leprosy and I nod, knowing it's a way
I'll never be. How tidy and unawful
my life seems destined to be,
how I turn left and right
for somebody's pain to draw and use
like a liter of dangerous blood,
red and hot with foreign bodies
too prickly to test.

And now the preacher muses
on the healing that happens
when we turn back to say thanks.
And how do I turn, which way,
how send some message to those
murky souls whose suffering
is my ease, ghosts I ride like
the old man of the sea and will
not get off but keep saying
if not for you, oh if not for you.

Testing the Memory

An Introduction

by
Warren
Kliewer

Time passes, and you accumulate a storehouse of memories. More time passes, and you discover that looking up a long-lost old friend is as interesting as making a new one, that revisiting a dreary neighborhood where you once lived is as stimulating as exploring a new place. You find yourself choosing not to read a new book but to reread one that you had read many years earlier. I used to marvel at older people. "Why do they wallow in nostalgia?" I wondered. But time has passed. I no longer regard it as wallowing in the frivolous. Instead, it's a test. Every stage in life has its appropriate tests. In childhood we run and jump and flex our muscles. In early youth we fall in love and test our loyalty. We go into business and test our ingenuity. And there comes a stage in life when testing the memory is the new challenge.

"Ah, but memory plays tricks," people say, fretting about distortions and inaccuracies. I don't worry much about that anymore. Certainly I want to tell the truth. Most people do. But I also know that a correct recounting of the facts can sometimes create a plausible surface reality that deceives. I've read books, seen plays, and viewed a great many films and television shows in which the surface details were correct, but the truth had slipped between the facts. Besides, a bad memory can be fun. Memory plays tricks, does it? So does a magician. The illusion created by sleight of hand can be most entertaining. I have devoted my life to weaving fictions on stage and on the page, and I've grown to admire what a bad memory does to the past, making it simpler, clearer, more orderly, more symmetrical . . . more like a work of art.

These sketches are based on memory. If you are seeking facts, beware. For when I wrote them, I was in search of truths. And to serve that quest for truths, one must sometimes surrender to the rules dictated by bad memory or good art—two creative processes which may be more similar than one had thought.

In Search of a Name

For many years I assumed, with no proof, that I had been named after Harding, the twenty-ninth president of the United States. No one had actually said that. I had just figured it out. I had had an older brother who died at birth. He had been named Calvin. That sounded like the influence of Coolidge, the thirtieth president. I concluded that my parents were creating a pattern, initiating a parade of presidential names for sons. Calvin had come first, I had come next, the third would have to be named Woodrow.

I didn't like this idea at all. I knew very little about Warren Gamaliel Harding, and what little I did know inspired no respect and no desire to learn any more. Besides, presidents' names were out of place in our humble village, like those presidential street names that erupt in the middles of many American cities, interrupting the useful flow of numerical streets—Eleventh, Twelfth, Thirteenth—with a sequence beginning Washington Street, Adams Street, and Jefferson Street.

Besides, this patriotic American idea broke our usual Germanic custom of naming children after relatives and ancestors. As a child I knew with all my heart I should have been named Martin or Heinrich or Hermann or Gerhard, good solid names, as tough and tangy as old leather. But Warren? That's not a real name, I thought. So I looked it up in the dictionary. This made me no happier, for I discovered that a "warren" is a system of underground burrows were rabbits live. Why, I kept on wondering, hadn't my parents been astute as the Penner family, who had named their sons Siegfried and Helmut? Such names resounded with mythological dimensions. Or, better yet, I could have been given a name that would boil down into a single, hard-edged, kick-in-the-teeth monosyllable like Hank or Jake or Pete. Instead, I'd been named after a rabbit hole.

Heinrich Martin Kroeker

I did have the consolation of a traditional middle name. During their hundred-year stay in Russia (now Ukraine), German-speaking Mennonites had picked up the Russian custom of giving sons a patronymic, so that, for example, Ivan's son Maxim would have Ivanovich as his middle name, and the grandson would have Maximovich as his patronymic. As a child I considered my middle name, John, to be some consolation, but not much. Why couldn't they have named me Werner? Or Wolfgang?

In retrospect I can see that I was born during an epidemic of anglicizing. Any number of my friends had been squeezed into ill-fitting names like Donald and Shirley and Fern and Arlie—names of the right size but the wrong shape, like badly made shoes. Clearly a trend had developed. We were all being given names that English-speaking outsiders could spell with no difficulty. And many of us, I now remember, expressed our discomfort by pronouncing our own names sloppily and hurriedly.

I understand now, as I did not in my childhood, that I was yearning for a vanishing tradition. In my great-grandparents' time the naming of a child was a medium for expressing harmony between the given name and the family name, between both names and the language, between the new child and the forebears. The selection process, therefore, was elegantly simple. The four children whose life-choices ultimately gave birth to me were named, respectively, Margareta Epp, Gerhard Kliewer, Maria Ratzlaff, and Heinrich Martin Kroeker. Their first and last names fit together harmoniously, like the final chord of a Bach chorale. Why, I asked, couldn't I have been named Martin?

That last name in the list, Heinrich Martin Kroeker, drew me into speculation, especially after I found old photographs of him at various ages. The last picture taken of him was the first I discovered: his casket portrait. That genre has now gone out of fashion, but in his time a photographer would be brought in to capture the final memory of a person lying in state in a satin-lined coffin surrounded by a tasteful arrangement of flowers. People in traditional societies, having sat with and watched the agony of dying, cling to the memory of the serenity of death. But as a child of the twentieth century, I gasped at the gruesomeness of the custom and instead dwelt on the more youthful portraits—my grandfather in his middle age wearing a Van Dyke beard, my grandfather on his wedding day, my grandfather in his early twenties, a young man ready to take on the world, wearing a surprisingly modern suit and sporting an Americanized haircut, having an expression that seemed to say, "I could smile if I wanted to, but I have other things on my mind right now."

In all his life portraits it was his pale blue eyes that held me. They were vulnerable and yet compelling. I arranged the portraits in chronological order and then I detected something, a progression of something, perhaps some private agony. The eyes seemed not so much to ask for help as for the viewer's recognition of pain too persistent to ignore and too personal to discuss. "Let this be known," the eyes seemed to say, "but only because it is the truth."

My oldest cousins tell me that I resemble H.M. Kroeker more and more as I grow older, that my walk and stance are like his. How is this possible? I never saw him. He died before I was born. How could I have imitated him? Is there some racial memory embodied in the muscles and bones? Am I, I began to wonder, like him in other ways?

It was easier to ask questions than to find answers. I did learn that he had been fluent in Russian, High German,

and Low German, that at the time he died he subscribed to thirty-two periodicals in German, English, and probably Russian, and that he read them all. Later, when I was a few years older, I began to uncover darker stories. He was no social drinker, but from time to time, I was told, he'd feel the need to cut loose, and he'd go off somewhere, who knows were, to indulge in a grand, extravagant, Russian-style carouse. And then he'd come back home meekly.

On one occasion, returning late at night before the effects had worn off, he fuzzily discovered that his wife, my grandmother, had locked him out. Now, farm houses in those days had doors that could be locked, but they never were, so he never carried keys. In locking the doors, then, my grandmother was making a statement. That night he slept in the barn. No one has any idea what kind of conversations husband and wife had the next day. There were probably demands on one side and promises on the other, but I never heard that there had been a permanent change in the marriage. It is likely that the morning's reconciliation did not touch on the private grief which his blue eyes hinted at and which his drinking eased only temporarily.

Years after my first childhood curiosity about him, my mother casually passed on his account of the first time he stepped out into American life. He was fifteen at the time, and he had made a point of listening to English-speaking people to pick up the language. He was, in fact, the only one in his family who knew any English at all. So when his father, my great-grandfather, needed a shovel but didn't have the right kind, young Heinrich Martin was sent to borrow one from the neighbors. As he walked the half-mile to their farmstead, he rehearsed over and over how to make his request until he was absolutely sure he had it right.

The neighbors were as curious about these new foreign immigrants as Heinrich was about them, so they gathered around, parents and children, to look him over. He drew himself up and declared, in what he was sure was impeccable English, "You. Me. Shovel. Borrow?" The whole family, parents and children, collapsed in rude laughter over my grandfather's first public English sentence.

Maybe they got tired of laughing or read embarrassment in his blue eyes, but they did finally catch themselves and lend him the shovel, and in the ensuing months and years took pains to teach him the language and ways of America. It was not until my mother, in telling me the story, casually mentioned that the neighbors' family name was Warren, that I finally realized that Warren Gamaliel Harding had nothing to do with me. I had been named to pay back an old family debt.

Possibly her choice of a name meant even more than that. The Warren family had helped my grandfather take his first halting steps into Americanization, and perhaps my mother had wanted my name to nudge me a few steps farther along into assimilation—a process which, so long as I retain any memories of what came before, I shall probably never complete.

Pigeon Hunting

Uncle John lived on a farm and had a disease. Not until I was almost an adult did I learn the name of the disease, but at the age of twelve I knew it wasn't something you could catch, and so I gave it no thought at all. Other things held my attention—his house, for example, a weathered-white farmhouse with one story, one table, one bed, and two of everything else: rooms, windows, chairs, cups, forks. Over everything lay a film of old habits and accumulated dirt. The household was so rambunctiously dirty that a twelve-year-old boy could slog through the Minnesota-April mud and over the threshold and into the house without breaking his stride. Adults, I thought, abhor filth. But we boys sought out dirty places to do dirty things, like scratching, licking the plate, belching when the need arose.

It's possible I misremember. Maybe Uncle John wasn't really dirty, just mercifully understanding of my need to escape good behavior. Who knows what he really thought. Maybe he sighed with relief after each of my occasional visits and leaped into a frenzy of tidying up the silt I had deposited. I do remember now what I hardly noticed then. Uncle John's house may or may not have been clean, but it certainly was orderly. He saved everything for all possible reasons: sentiment saved 1920s floral-design postcards, frugality saved bacon fat and old socks with holes and anything else that could be used in some other way someday. Every item in the house had been filed away in its own place. Because of that and because the table, stove, sink, and cabinet were arranged in a tight triangle in one corner, he could cook and eat an entire meal without taking more than two steps in any direction.

But after my courtesy call to the house, I always headed for the barn, even though it no longer held anything of value. It was a complete barn, originally built to embrace all the life of a farm. There were stanchions for milk cows, stalls for horses, pens for farrowing pigs, and a hayloft you reached by clambering up on one-by-fours nailed unevenly between joists. That was always my destination, the hayloft. The ground floor had low ceilings, and the vestiges of hay and straw and manure had moldered into gray-brown, earthlike mounds. Then if you'd climb straight up the sporadic ladder steps and squeeze through the two-foot-square hole, you'd emerge into cavernous space. It was a cathedral that did magical things. Your voice echoed. You could look down through the crack between your feet and squint your eyes and make things take new shapes.

Even though the farm animals were long gone, there was a new population up in the hayloft. Barn swallows built nests and brooded through the springs. Bats came and went throughout the year, gorging themselves fat on August mosquitoes. But the pigeons got my whole attention one day. This flock had found a hole in the hay-loft door and were roosting the winter away in the rafters. Having read a few issues of *Field and Stream* and having been given a .22 caliber rifle by my father and having shot a few tin cans off the

tops of fence posts, I made plans for a pigeon hunt.

So on a bearable February Saturday—in Minnesota anything above zero degrees is considered bearable—I announced to my mother that we'd be eating pigeons for supper, and I put on my red-and-black checked hunting mackinaw with a special rubber-lined pocket at the back for stashing one's slaughtered game. I saddled my pony, tied my rifle onto the saddle, and set off on the five-mile trip northward to Uncle John's farm, expecting to return that afternoon with my game pocket stuffed with birds and stained with clotted, frozen blood.

City-dwellers may cringe at the thought of eating pigeons. Rightly so, perhaps. City-dwelling pigeons often do degenerate when they pick up the eating habits of seagulls and the obsequiousness of panhandlers, and observing the rotted offal city pigeons eat does not encourage one's appetite. But in the wild, pigeons, like all other species fending for themselves, are constantly culled by predators: hawks from above and skunks down below and the brutal Minnesota winter at any altitude. Wild pigeons survive for only that brief time when they are healthy and alert. Any wild pigeon still flying in February is sure to be in good health. Besides, my Uncle John's corncrib stood no more than thirty feet from the barn. What could be easier? An unlimited supply of clean, nutritious corn. Each morning they'd fly down to the crib, gobble up as many kernels as their crops would hold, and waddle the thirty feet back to the barn where they'd spend the rest of the day digesting in the rafters and cooing on whatever topic it is that pigeons talk about.

A full belly breeds complacency. When I first crawled into the hayloft—an undersized twelve-year-old encumbered by two pairs of pants, a flashy, stiff mackinaw, an earlapped cap, and mittens, and dragging behind me a skimpy .22 rifle—the pigeons showed their contempt by not moving an inch. I have no doubt they were saying snide things about town boys who venture into the country, and contemplating doing disgusting things on my head. Perched some twenty feet above me, they had no need to retreat. I moved slowly, eased myself down on one knee, removed my mittens, loaded my single-shot .22, drew a dead on a deliciously large cock pigeon, squeezed the trigger, and missed by at least a yard. And whoosh-whoosh-flap-flap! The whole flock vanished through the narrow hole in the hay door. These were, after all, wild pigeons.

You have never seen a space so empty as the hayloft at that moment. My life's purpose had gone out the haydoor with them. Undeterred, I clambered down the makeshift ladder and found the pigeons outside shrewdly reorganized into battle formation. A few were roosting on the ridgepole of the barn, a few more atop the corncrib, and the rest circling around as reconnaissance squads, trying to figure out what the red nuisance down on the ground was up to.

H. M. Kroeker homestead near Mountain Lake, Minnesota

With hindsight it's easy to see what I should have done: find a hiding place where I could be hidden from view and sheltered from the wind. For a .22 caliber bullet is easily deflected. Don't believe those legends of Davy Crockett which say that he could hit the eye of a squirrel at a hundred yards with a single ball from a double-action muzzle-loader. Davy Crockett never hunted in the cold prairie winds of Minnesota, where you have to predict gusts and calculate trajectories and compensate for the glare of sunlight on the ice. I did none of those things. Down on one knee I went, loaded with half-frozen fingers (you can't load a rifle while wearing mittens), and before the pigeons had a moment to sleuth out my maneuver, I aimed at that same cock pigeon defiantly parading along the peak of the roof and fired. I have no idea how wide I missed or how far the bullet traveled: I hope that it landed harmlessly in an empty field. I do know where the pigeons went: beyond the horizon. The entire flock rose in unison and flapped with purpose as if they had all decided to start a northward migration two months early.

Well, I thought, if they want to be shrewd, I'll be shrewd. Back up the ladder I want, hand over hand, mitten over mitten, and found a bit of debris and threw up a makeshift pigeon blind in a corner opposite to the hold in the hay door. And I squatted down to wait.

When the temperature is twenty degrees or so, sitting still for ten minutes seems like an hour. So I don't know how long I waited. Nothing came in but the wind. Time passed. I put the gun down on the floor. More time passed. I put my mittens back on. Nothing moved. I started thinking about the wood-burning stove in the house. I took my mittens off, unloaded, put my mittens back on, and started toward the ladder. Just at that moment the pigeon scout appeared in the haydoor hole, cocked his head to look me over, and aboutfaced out into the cold sky again. The pigeons, it was obvious, had no in-

tention of being breaded or gravied.

But cold though I was, a vestige of my racial memory of the hunter instinct still stirred somewhere below consciousness. I shivered my way down the ladder. I walked around inside the barn to peer out all the dirt-encrusted windows. Sure enough, about a third of the flock had stopped off at the corncrib and were preoccupied with stockpiling more corn. They'll never notice me, I thought. Greed gets them every time. I stole all the way around to the back of the barn, braced my gun against the corner, controlled my shivering with determined will power, squeezed the trigger, and demolished an ear of corn about eighteen inches upwind of my target. Had I been wrong to compensate for the wind?

Now the pigeons were gone for good, I thought. In hunting you don't get a second chance. That may be why it appeals to grownup men, but it's hard for a twelve-year-old to take. I couldn't make myself believe the pigeons would come back in less than two weeks, and I dreaded going back into the house. What would Uncle John say? He had a droll sense of humor which seemed funny while it hinted at other meanings. But what else could I do? I couldn't saddle up the pony and head home. I certainly couldn't go wandering aimlessly in the cold. So, bracing myself for humiliation, I headed for the house.

When he asked, "Get any?" I concentrated on stomping the snow off my boots and muttered, "No," without elaborating.

He nodded solemnly and changed the subject: "Cold out there?" His maneuver shouldn't be confused with tact. Farmers live by the unsentimental awareness that our survival is fed by the deaths of other creatures. So why should one spare the feelings of a kid who can't shoot straight? And yet, as I remember that day, his gesture seems almost delicate. A man who has learned to live with a disease does not make casual jokes about falling short.

"You hungry?" he asked. Now, I had a reputation in those days for devouring four or more meals a day, and many a relative smiled at my apparent compliment to her cooking. So I'm sure I said yes enthusiastically, even though Uncle John's cooking was known to be primitive and I considered his table manners slovenly. He drank his coffee, for example, by tipping the cup to spill the coffee and then sipping from the saucer. How embarrassing, I thought then, not knowing that he was merely preserving old folkways, an eighteenth-century way of cooling hot liquids.

The meal we ate that noon was a "brunch," though that word may not yet have been invented and certainly had not penetrated to a lonely farm five miles away from an isolated, German-speaking village. The bacon we ate was as black and the eggs as hard as Uncle John's old-fashioned cast iron skillet. But being a cold twelve-year-old, I demolished every edible in sight and would have taken on the skillet as well if it had been handy.

Uncle John gave me no condolences on my failure. I didn't need sympathy, I needed three pigeons to feed three people. Well, pigeons are small, so six would have made a real meal, not just a nibble. Twelve would have been best of all. Twelve would have made me a real hunter with surplus game to share with the neighbors.

But I did get a bit of wildlife advice. Uncle John, as a result of the disease, spoke in a monotone and walked stooped over, so that he looked up at you from under his eyebrows. You had to listen carefully to catch his emphases. He muttered something about sitting still and not being so impatient and those pigeons didn't have anywhere else to go, so wait for them and they'll come to you.

It worked. It took the fortitude of an Eskimo to wait them out in the cold hayloft, but I brought down two pigeons. When the first one fell, the whole flock vanished out their escape hole. When the second pigeon fell, the whole flock with one mind fled to the next county or maybe even to California. Pigeons are not known for their intelligence, but two deaths in one day had been enough to persuade them that I had started a trend. I have no idea whether they ever came back. They certainly did not during the hour or two I waited.

The last time I saw Uncle John, he was living in a nursing home, leaning heavily on a walker, even more stooped over. His hair was neatly combed and he was wearing a clean, starched shirt. I wondered whether this was his idea or the women attendants who most certainly must have spent many hours wearing down his life-long bachelor habits. He could still move around, but the multiple sclerosis had completely taken his voice away.

"You remember Warren?" my father asked.

Uncle John's face mimed great shock and surprise. He looked at me, shook his head, waved his arm laterally at what must have been my twelve-year-old height, pointed at me, shook his head again, and again waved his arm back and forth. Then he gave me the broadest grin I've ever seen on his face. I nodded. He grinned again, as if he'd been saving his laughter for more than thirty years.

I'm not sure what happened to the rifle. I think it might have rusted away. It's just as well. If you can't shoot one supper's worth of overfed pigeons inside a hayloft, you might as well look for something else to do with your life, as Uncle John surmised long before I did.

Life in the Remount Depot

I was probably the only eleven-year-old in town who actually enjoyed going to the barber shop. It presented possibilities unavailable anywhere else. For if the shop was empty, I could visit with John the Barber. And on Saturdays when the shop was full and noisy because the farmers had come to town and all week the pressure had been building up because they'd had no one to talk to but their families and livestock, and if I sat still and kept quiet so that they'd forget I was there, I'd hear all sorts of things little boys weren't supposed to hear about. It was during World War II. Everyone had opinions about the war, the government, the bankers. Every Saturday was a minia-

ture town meeting for a rough-and-ready but democratic exchange of ideas. Or the talk would turn to gossip, not the idle chatter I knew from school, but hard talk that dug deep. I knew about sins. I'd heard about them on Sunday mornings. But this talk entered dark caverns in the human psyche even preachers didn't dare allude to: who owed money to whom and refused to pay it, who was destroying his children by working them too hard, who had died sooner than he needed to. I learned about sin in sermons and about evil in the barber shop.

And the Saturday crowd opened undreamt-of possibilities of the English language. For the Mennonites in the community, High German was the language of the church, or had been until the war started, and Low German was the language of real life—a distinction not unlike that between Hebrew and Yiddish—and English, of course, was the language of assimilation and therefore propriety. But the Norwegian and Danish farmers on Saturdays made no such tidy distinctions. They said things—in English, yet!—I would never hear at home: raucous tales and cursing and fresh imagery and smut and malapropisms and sorts of other linguistic glories. The Mennonite English I had learned was pristine, plain prose. From these Scandinavian farmers I heard something verging on poetry.

But John the Barber was himself the main reason for going to the shop. He was my father's namesake and cousin, so I couldn't call him uncle John, though I thought of him that way. I could have called him First-Cousin-Once-Removed-John, which is what he was, but you can't say things like that when you're eleven years old. So he became John the Barber, a name that worked pretty well, except when I happened to think of his by-name one Sunday morning just as the preacher referred to John the Baptist, and I dissolved in a giggle. John—the Barber, not the Baptist—had been in the army. He had worn a uniform, the real thing. He'd shown me pictures of himself in tight-belted jacket, flaring riding breeches, and puttees. No one else in town, I was sure, had ever worn a uniform, not even the policeman, who wore overalls. Well, of course I knew the marching band and basketball players and cheerleaders all wore like-minded clothes. But I knew the difference between cheerleaders' satin and soldiers' scratchy wool, the stiff, blood-absorbent wool John the Barber had worn. The pictures whetted my appetite for explanations.

The stories came one afternoon when the shop was empty for hours. It was as if everyone's hair had stopped growing. John took most of the afternoon to tell me the whole truth. He had never been in the cavalry, not the real cavalry, had never been part of the centuries-old tradition of expert riders who lived their entire fighting lives in the company of horses, their two bodies merging, as it were, while accomplishing astonishingly fast turns, dangerous rock climbs, and lung-wrenching races, punctuated by rare moments of repose when these creatures of different species took care of each other and held wordless communication. Instead, John the Barber had been assigned to a remount depot attached to an artillery unit in Montana, and had not even been assigned his own horse. In fact, most of the animals in the remount depot weren't even horses. They were mules.

In fact, it could well be that John was really a stablehand in uniform. The mules were draft animals used to haul cannons and caissons around. There were very few horses in the remount depot, and these were docile brutes that ignored noise so that officers could get from one place to another in rough terrain. There were no "mighty steeds" at the remount depot, I can see now with the benefit of many years of disenchantment; there were only "plugs." John was permanently assigned to a unit destined never to see battle, only a kind of boot camp where mules and horses were retrained for the army and where officers, who had never seen a horse before and never wanted to, came reluctantly to learn how to ride—a combination obedience school and riding academy. And since the army was rapidly phasing out the use of mules and horses, by the end of the war few animals came into the remount depot and fewer shipped out.

But I was eleven years old and had read *Robin Hood* and *Ivanhoe* and was determined to find romance wherever it might lurk. Time passed without my noticing as I listened to tales of an incorrigible horse being broken by a patient soldier, of a mule deciding that he disliked one particular soldier and kicking holes in an oak stable door every time this man came near, of a soldier neglecting to tighten the cinch of his skimpy government-issue McClellan saddle and the horse running away with the saddle under its belly with the frantic soldier chasing.

The best stories were of the practical jokes these bored soldiers perpetrated, not impulsive little pranks like switching horses or tying weights onto a horse's tail, but well-thought-out schemes that would give bored soldiers something to think about and fill their monotonous days. One day a young officer arrived, imported from somewhere in the East, and suddenly the pranksters in the unit had a lot to think about. Within hours the officer had humiliated and insulted and alienated everyone of his own rank and below. The soldiers, who could see he knew nothing about animals, kept hoping the army just might make a mistake and assign him an incorrigible killer of a horse. Instead, he was given a handsome bay, as tranquil as a child's pony. Clearly, something had to be done. One solder, who resented his long hours of smelly labor, puzzled and thought and planned and concocted a scheme—a crime that would be perfect because the evidence would destroy itself.

The opportunity presented itself one morning when he was ordered to saddle the arrogant officer's horse. Up long before sunrise, he got the horse out in the dark and exercised it in the dark corral until it defecated, and then saddled up. The soldier's stance was stiff and his salute perfect as he held the horse's head for the officer to mount, and then the soldier stepped surreptitiously to the horse's hindquarters and slipped a greased hot pepper into the horse's anus. For a few minutes, as the grease was being absorbed, the horse was docile. A crowd of soldiers was

gathering, and as they watched, the gelding's hindquarters began to dance with an exotic rhythm. As the pepper warmed up, the horse became more frantic and then leaped, tried to climb the rails of the corral, fell on top of the rider, and raced bucking and squealing around the corral. One of the watching soldiers shouted, "That's government property, men! Don't let it get away!" A dozen men clambered over the rails and chased the gelding around and around, so that each circuit of the corral brought them back to and top of and over the fallen rider, covering him with yet another layer of manure-laden dust.

The superior officer gave some of the men a dressing down that sounded more like a commendation than a reprimand. Lt. Arrogant, after a day or so in the infirmary, was transferred to another unit. And I'm sure the horse got rid of the pepper in the usual way.

All these stories, I realized years later, were about other people's pranks or mishaps or adventures. John told no stories about himself. Why? I wondered, always an observer off on the side, never a central character, never the one who thought up the prank or solved the problem? This happened, you understand, at least ten years after the eleven-year-old had listened intently, sitting on the edge of the chair. I couldn't imagine him as a retiring personality. The barber shop was always a popular place where John at his barber chair placed himself in the center of the room and in the middle of all conversations. Maybe he had been a shy boy who blossomed?

Or maybe not. John had, I remembered, always been prim and proper. He dressed fastidiously. The creases in his pants were sharp and straight. The nails were always newly manicured. His shoes were always polished and the heels were never run down. You would never have guessed, seeing him in his barber shop, that as a nineteen-year-old he had curried mules and shoveled out manure.

Maybe that very fastidiousness was a clue. But where did that clue point? Was it that he described his friends' adventures so freely because he had none of his own? One day a few years after that grand story-telling session he dropped one hint. He had been the only soldier with a designated non-combatant status in the remount depot. He was one of a kind. All the other soldiers were regular army. They'd had the luck—good or bad, depending on how they felt about Montana and mules—to be assigned grooming and training duties for the time being. These regular soldiers must have known that they could be sent to the trenches at any time, and that John's non-combatant status would probably keep him safely in a region the Huns had no interest in invading.

What had been the effect, I wondered when I was in college, on young John's being an anomaly to his barracks mates? His name, his accent, his second language all sounded Germanic. He must have remembered the turbulence in town before he went off to Montana, when gangs of men came from the county seat thirteen miles away to paint "Slacker" in large yellow letters on the houses and businesses of German-speaking Mennonites, then rounded up the leaders of the community—the preachers, the richest businessmen—to march them down the main street accompanied by hoots and shouts and drumbeats on pails and garbage can lids. There's no way he couldn't have carried those memories with him into the remount depot. Was it possible that John spent his war years lying low, following the rules, challenging no authority, shining his shoes and creasing his pants, calling no attention to himself, playing no pranks?

If so, it wouldn't surprise me. During that very popular war. The Great War, the war to make the world safe for democracy, there was little provision for traditional pacifists, who had but two choices: prison or induction into the army as non-combatants. John would have known that he'd had to choose between dealing with mules or living with felons. The army offered a third choice. If a non-combatant became a personnel problem, he could be shipped to the front and assigned ambulance duty. He could be assigned the task of picking up the bodies between the two armies, and then asked at that moment whether he was willing to carry a gun to protect himself. Armies do have ways of keeping the ranks tidy. I wouldn't be surprised if John the Barber had become very thoughtful during the years of his war.

What's surprising is not how little but how much he told me on that day of glorious tales. On another day, maybe sixteen or more years later when I was in graduate school, I stopped in at the shop. By then my visits to the town of our origin had become less and less frequent, and my visits to barbers shockingly rare. Somewhere among the joviality and triviality that fuel any conversation searching for common ground between two generations, I reminded him of the afternoon he had told me the tale of the horse and the pepper. "Yah, those were the good times," he said smiling and looking over the tops of his glasses. I waited. But he did not offer to tell me any more stories.

Poems
by Sheri Hostetler

I consider writing a spiritual practice because it grounds me in the detail of my own life. Writing helps me penetrate the fog of my lazy, restless mind to a mind that is clear and direct. I know what I think and what I believe when I write.

Writing is an ethical practice for me, too, because it is very difficult for me to lie when I write. I have to pay attention to what is and be honest about what has happened. Writing also replenishes my love and compassion for the world—not the abstract, big world, but the small, little world. The world of details.

My writing mind is the one that remembers these details: the strawberry seeds behind my mother's fingernails, the sound of sheets on the clothesline snapping in the wind. It is also the mind that penetrates the surface, that discovers the world that exists behind a single word (as I did in the poem "Probe on Occupation").

I don't consciously set out to write poems about being Mennonite. But because I grew up in an Amish/Mennonite community in Ohio, wheat fields, farmhouses and four-part singing occupy my memory. When I first started writing, I was estranged from the Mennonite community and was a little surprised to find myself writing so much about them. Back then, I didn't realize how much of writing is remembering—telling stories—and I'm not sure I knew the stories I'd be telling would be my own.

My Brothers Taught Me to Lead

We are sitting in our fruit cellar
waiting for the tornado to strike
three folding chairs
a small one for me
I have brought my Bible and stuffed squirrel
my brothers their sarcasm and defiance
of my mother's authority
the authority of her fear
which is all my mother brings with her
Every so often one of my brothers
runs up to the basement door to peer out
to check the progress of the storm
to court danger
"He wouldn't have time to
run downstairs if it hit!"
my mother says
I know it is possible
My brothers can see the leaves turn belly up
watch the boughs bend and break
scan the mad gray sky for the one cloud that funnels
feel the heavy silence press in on their body
hear the spread roar of a 1,000-car freight train
wait until the sound converges in their ear and
still have time to run downstairs to the fruit cellar
packed tight in the earth
I am in awe of their willingness
to dance with danger
on the hunch that they will lead

Probe on Occupation

occupier and occupied. i inhabit my world
am ruthless and humbled

i seize the day, sometimes the day
seizes me and i am lifted aloft
above the world of shadow and try
sometimes i have a seizure and
plummet with heavy heart to earth

walking down the sidewalk my body
seizes the space air used to inhabit
though the wind try to move me
i am strong, in control of my
materiality

i have an occupation
it occupies me
takes my time
employs my mind
my occupational hazard is
to be occupied,
taken over, subsumed by
meniality

my foreparents occupied land
that belonged to Native Americans
digging through the occupation layer
of the Hostetler homestead
you will find arrowheads, dried
flakes of Hostetler blood
i can't say they didn't deserve it

i occupy my hands and my apartment

grocery lists often occupy my mind while walking
trees while standing still

i occupy the thoughts of my beloved
sometimes i want to occupy his body
live inside him, find the gentle hollow
in which i can curl and sleep
find the mutant cell
the locus dei
exorcise the unruly spirit that has
taken possession there

occupier and occupied, in the middling world
between glimmer and gulch
i take my place

DEFINITIONS:
occupation 1. a person's usual or principle work or business 2. the seizure and control of an area

occupational hazard danger or hazard to workers inherent in a particular occupation

occupation layer a layer of remains left behind by a single culture

occupy 1. to take or fill up (space, time, etc.) 2. to engage or employ the mind, energy or attention of 3. to seize, take possession or control of a place 4. to dwell in

"Probe on Occupation" by Sheri Hostetler was previously published in *13th Moon*, a literary journal of SUNY-Albany.

hands

i have seen her hands rapid fire picking
strawberries in wet fields june mornings
not minding tiny seed dirt under
fingernails nor stain of strawberries on
fingertips i have seen her hands locked
surely onto stem of tall garden weed they
latch and pull after a moment of
equilibrium her hands bring forth plant
stripped down to its two-foot turnip-like
root dark midwestern fertility hanging in
clods from its whiskers i have seen her
hands in the morning sunlight clipping
sheets on the clothesline with
assurance precision and i have seen one
hand select the most full most fragrant
rose stretching its stem while the other
hand threads its way through thorns to cut
those roses will be in a clear glass vase
on our table at supper where my father
prays every night the same thing "bless the
hands that have prepared this food"

in our family photo album, a portrait of
my mother: forearms from elbow to
clenched fists long red gashes (Xed out by
black stitches) running the length of her
veins they call it carpal tunnel syndrome
it is what happens when you use your hands
too much

Book Reviews

Al Reimer, *Mennonite Literary Voices: Past and Present.* North Newton, Kansas: Bethel College, 1993. Pp. 75. ($10.00—paperback) ISBN 0-9630160-2-4

Literary movements are made by critics, not writers, though it has often been the case that those critics who most effectively named literary events—Pound and Eliot come to mind—were writers themselves, with a vested interest in the movement's alleged agenda. Al Reimer, novelist and Professor Emeritus of English at the University of Winnipeg, is one such writer/critic, and in this volume, he does for Canadian Mennonite writing what good criticism does. It establishes a literary and historical context for the work and invents the story of its evolution. It identifies the literature's distinctive features and articulates common themes, thereby setting parameters for the movement. Perhaps most important, it clears the way for the work's reception by introducing it to a larger readership and defending it against anticipated and real reproach—even defending the writer's prerogative to use vulgar language, in this case!

Mennonite Literary Voices is based on Reimer's Menno Simons lectures delivered at Bethel College in 1991—fifteen years after John Ruth came to some different conclusions about the same subject in his lectures, published as *Mennonite Identity and Literary Art* (Herald Press, 1978). A spirited appraisal of the disparity between Ruth's and Reimer's visions by Elmer Suderman appeared last year in this magazine (September 1992 issue). The contrast between their views on the artist's place in the community is particularly striking, and an exploration of it could easily lead to an examination of the differences between the Swiss-German and Dutch-Russian Mennonite cultures.

Reimer has taken the discussion of Mennonite literature a few steps beyond where Ruth left off in 1976. A member of the Manitoba circle of Mennonite writers, Reimer brings us up to date on the large body of Mennonite literature that appeared since Ruth's lectures, almost entirely within the Dutch/Russian tradition in Canada. In four chapters, he addresses the following topics: history, male writers, female writers, and *troubles.* The first chapter traces a thread of literary activity (occasionally manifest only in oral culture) along an intriguing route from *Martyrs' Mirror* through the settlements in Russia to Canada where early 20th century Mennonite artists wrote in German. He notes that the horrors of the Russian Revolution and its aftermath "shocked the Mennonite literary imagination into life as nothing had since the age of martyrdom"—significantly suggesting one use for violence in our tradition.

The central chapters are devoted to the flowering of Mennonite literature in English, which began in Canada with Rudy Wiebe's first novel and now also finds vital expression in verse. Reimer offers readings of significant contemporary Mennonite writers and gives thoughtful consideration to gender issues in relation to the women's work. (A more recent version of the chapter on women's writing appeared in *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, vol. 10, 1992.) He shows how Mennonite writers have helped to shape a regional Canadian literature while dwelling on "the dissident frontier" of their own communities.

In the final chapter, Reimer addresses the difficult relationship between the "new Mennonite literary prophets" and the Mennonite community. Here he takes up conversation with John Ruth in earnest. Although he calls Ruth's lectures "prescriptive," Reimer is no less imperious for all his careful readings of the literature and its history. Aligning himself with a spirit of secular individualism (the artist is prophet and outsider), Reimer sets himself in opposition to Ruth, who is cast with the religious community (the artist is scribe of oral tradition and insider). Reimer complains that Ruth never refers to the artist's role as prophet-teacher, which strikes me as odd, since Ruth does quote Robert Penn Warren on "the destruction of order for the sake of reordering," and he clearly admits that the writer's work "may seem blasphemous, as Jesus' or Stephen's views of the

temple did" (p. 50). Certainly, though, Ruth is more conservative and community-minded.

For Reimer, the artist must be prepared "to lead the advance, to be the scout and preliminary mapmaker of that part of the interior landscape of the mind and soul not yet fully explored or charted." This vision is essentially Romantic—akin to views articulated elsewhere by Elmer Suderman and Warren Kliewer, both Russian Mennonites who grew up in the American West. In Reimer's scout and mapmaker of the soul one hears echoes of Shelly's heroic Poet who will "measure the depth of human nature with a comprehensive and all-penetrating spirit." I can't help wondering whether the relentless migration and exile experience of the Russian Mennonite informs more than metaphors here: the gifted pioneer blazes the way for the community, while living on its frontier. (In contrast, Ruth continues to wrestle with ghosts on his ancestral farm along Skippack Creek in Pennsylvania, where Mennonites have been living for three centuries.)

Reimer points out that Western literature has "developed in a direction away from the community . . . (and) the literate artist is by nature and calling an outsider." For the moment, this role seems to serve a useful purpose, at least in Canada, where for the most part, writers are the exiles who made it out alive, the ones who escaped to tell. The conflict herein seems to be as generative as martyrdom was in the 16th century or violence and dislocation were during the first half of the 20th century. It is interesting to note that much of their writing continues to draw upon the oral tradition—no matter how furiously the individual imagination confronts traditional ways. Generally, even that confrontation is conceived along traditional lines, as shown by Magdalene Redekop's often-quoted comparison: "The writers who are on the periphery, challenging the very idea of being Mennonite, may paradoxically be the most true to the spirit of the Reformation dissenters" (*Prairie Fire* 11, summer 1990). Consider how even the fundamental construct of inside/outside has unique significance for the strongly-bounded Mennonite community.

Eventually, though, it may be that the image of the Mennonite artist as heroic outsider will be seen as incomplete as the notion of the artist as humble insider. Or rather, perhaps both images must be considered simultaneously to understand the *dialogic* encounter between artist and his ethnic and religious context. New ways to construe this encounter must come from approaches that take into account the social—communal—construction of language and knowledge. The need for such perspectives will not be lost on those who write and read to come to terms with a culture that was initially created through language and that continues to rely upon language use and language difference to define itself.

Julia Kasdorf
Brooklyn, New York

Repha J. Buckman and Robert N. Lawson, eds., *Four Class Acts: Kansas Theatre*. Topeka, Kansas: Woodley Memorial Press, 1992. Pp. 422. ($10.00—paperback) ISBN 0-939391-16-3

Four Class Acts is a collection of four plays by Kansas playwrights. The plays vary in length from 80 to 130 pages and therefore each one, in production, would constitute a complete evening in the theater. The plays are titled "The Journal of Joshua Hosannah" by Larry R. Sadowski; "Dirk's Exodus" by James C. Juhnke; "Native Stone" by James B. Steerman; and "Saturday's Child" by Bob Peterson. One of the plays, "The Journal of Joshua Hosannah," won the Robert E. Gross Literary Prize for 1991. I will examine each play and make a few concluding comments on the entire volume.

The first play is "The Journal of Joshua Hosannah" by Larry R. Sadowski. The setting is during the homesteading era in Kansas. It begins like an expressionistic play with a chorus and an incantational listing of the hardships of life on the prairie. This incantational pattern is repeated at various times throughout the play. The play establishes an impressionistic world. It is a Whitmanesque device and seems to be an appropriate means to invoke the feeling of the undulating prairie.

The six characters are named Male One, Female Two, and so forth. While this may seem logical because they play multiple roles, it seems to diminish the sense of a "personality" for each character. It is worth noting, though, that names on stage, as in life, are significant. Some characters are named in the dialogue. The different characters serve as fellow citizens, farmers, children, relatives, etc.

Act I contains a number of significant themes. There is romance on the prairie, reports on the gunslingers in the lawless West, importance of Turkey Red wheat, humor and the miming of action. Some of the humor seems pejorative: Mennokits and Moscalf for Mennonite and Moscow.

The prairie era is evoked with the presence of wizard oils, the role of trains, and church life. The haunting memory of the recent Civil War is evoked with a reference to Matthew Brady's photography.

Act II brings in the blizzard of 1886 which was a catastrophe for many communities. It expands beyond the farm and field and introduces the saloon, the dance hall, circus and war (Civil and Cuban) and flying. It covers an era when the prairies entered significant changes. The play appears to be a wandering in a Midwest desert and ends with a final journey to the American promised land—California.

Time is greatly condensed. For example, romance, marriage, children all happen to the main character in the first 25 minutes of the play. This quick panorama, which serves like a snapshot album of a family, is the spirit of the work. The play seems like a photo exhibit with each photograph augmented by physical action and dialogue.

There are songs indicated in the script but no musical compositions accompany the text. Act I does not appear to have an ending which thrusts the action ahead to Act II. Much of the play

consists of declarative statements rather than dramatic exchanges among characters. This may work some of the time because it has the feel of a prairie litany, but may also become tiresome to an audience.

"Dirk's Exodus" by James Juhnke is the second play. Ten characters (8 male, 2 female) range in age from 8 to 60. There are also a few unnamed villagers. The year is 1569 and the setting is Asperen, Holland. The author's notes say it is a "fictional drama based on an historical event." The historical account can be found in the *Martyrs Mirror*, pp. 741-742. It tells of the martyrdom of Dirk Willems.

In telling the story of Dirk's compassion, Juhnke has also invoked images of biblical stories. Dirk is compared with the biblical Paul and Silas when they refused to escape from prison after an earthquake broke the doors. They ended up, instead, baptizing the jailer's family. Dirk escaping across water is also compared to Moses who crossed the Red Sea to freedom. Moses' burning bush, which began his role in history, is contrasted with the burning martyrdom of Dirk. The final major parallel is with the gamblers at the foot of the cross and their counterparts as the ale house patrons who debate, as a form of comic relief, Dirk's guilt and punishment.

Juhnke uses a device which Aristotle first recognized as the key to dramatic action: reversals. He employs three reversals which sustain the action. The first comes before the play opens; Dirk reverses his escape and returns to aid his captor. The second is the symbolic reversal which the inquisitor explicates, namely that Dirk's experience of crossing the water is the opposite of Moses'. Dirk returned to aid his pursuer instead of rejoicing in his drowning. Therefore he will not enter his promised land, but instead suffer a certain punishment. The other primary reversal occurs when Gretchen, the jailer's wife, desires baptism from Dirk.

"Dirk's Exodus" also uses a spoken and singing chorus. Here it evokes the solemnity of the occasion and provides a sense of transcendent significance to the actions which are at the center of the play.

The style of the play can best be described by referring to Sam Smiley's observation, "There are two great species of drama—the mimetic and the didactic. Aristotle favored the first, Plato the second . . . . Didactic drama is created with the primary intent of teaching or persuading." (Sam Smiley, *The Drama of Attack*, 1972, p. 6) Junhke's play is a Platonic work with the intention of teaching and even persuading an audience to greater sacrifice.

The play is set at the conclusion of the medieval era and it establishes a medieval world. Its structure is consistent with medieval plays although this reviewer is not convinced that it is a mystery or a tragedy. Instead "Dirks' Exodus" is consistent with the form and structure of medieval "mystery plays."

A "medieval mystery" is a play which delves into the mystery of how the Divine becomes incarnated in the human realm. Within a mystery play a flawless hero (Jesus, primarily) dies and his death effects a transformation on some of those who observe it. Some, though, are not changed, for example, the gamblers at the cross and ale house patrons. Juhnke has developed Dirk as a flawless hero whose coming death has the power to transform others: Gretchen and possibly Hans the jailer.

The play has the strengths of mystery plays. It is about a noble character, profound beliefs, and ethical lessons. It also has the weaknesses of mystery plays: notable characters are seldom very human and we find it difficult to identify with them. Tragic characters, on the other hand, are compelling on account of their tragic flaws; comedic characters on account of comic flaws. Dirk seems to know his direction and to have unlimited inner resources to follow it.

This lack of humanness seems to affect Dirk's responses to the Inquisitor. Dirk never seems to respond in a human way to the basic charges of sedition and anarchy. Did Dirk not comprehend this charge? Was he oblivious to it? Somehow the clowns in the ale house seem more human than the Inquisitor or Dirk. Juhnke has attempted to humanize Dirk with his prison escape and the scenes with his children, but the predominant motif is otherwise.

In the end, while the Inquisitor claims to hold the key to the Church, Hans has lost the keys to the prison and Dirk seems to have the key that really matters: the key to faith. The play concludes with the reversal of the burning bush, namely a spectacle of a burning martyr.

The music compositions by J. Harold Moyer greatly enhance the play. The music is consistent with the mood and intensity of the play.

"Native Stone" by James B. Steerman is set on a Chase County, Kansas, farm in the 1980s. Nine characters (5 male, 4 female) range in age from 7 to 75. This is the second play in this volume where a "diary" provides the background for plot and character. It is the diary of a Kansas homesteader and the grandfather of Arch Miller, the play's main character. The central problem in the play is the imminent sale of the homestead. Arch, of course, does not want to sell but feels forced to do so because of the low income and, as we slowly learn, the recovery from his farming accident and his wife's illness. The play is set the day before and the day of the auction. Family members are coming. One son, Mike, has not been back in 18 years. Arch distrusts his son-in-law, a lawyer, who seems to make an unrealistic "grab" for the farm. None of the children communicate with any degree of compassion for each other, which can be the seed for great drama and, quite possibly, an honest mirror for many rural families. The main character, Arch, is waiting for his sons to step forward and save the farm. They do not and the degree of distance between them seems to stretch probability. They have each bought vacation homes, farms of nearly equal value to the home place. That is why they don't have funds to rescue the farm. Yet they appear never to have told each other about these until now. They seem more like strangers than family. This may have been the playwright's intention.

Steerman has developed parallels to Chekhov's "Cherry Orchard." There is a sense of Chekhov's world, place and

plot (the American prairies are in many ways parallel to the Russian steppes). The farm must be sold and there is hope for a final savior. Whereas the hope was focused on a rich neighbor and rival in Chekhov, "Native Stone" places it within the family. "Cherry Orchard" announced the end of a decadent aristocracy; "Native Stone" illustrates the development of a new one, namely the movement of a family into the luxuries of the American lucrative professions. The name of the main character is illustrative: Arch. He stands between and above the pillars of the past, illustrated by the homestead diary, and the pillars of the future, his children.

The native stone of Kansas formed the structure of the farm house and it is the hitching post in the new town home. It is a symbol that has undeveloped potential in this play.

"Saturday's Child" by Bob Peterson is a play that has 6 characters (5 female, 1 male). It is set in contemporary time in a home in Topeka, Kansas. The play is about the inner psyche of a winner of the Miss America contest and her desire to discover herself. This leads the main character into various side roads. She wants to pursue forbidden love with a Catholic boy, reacts to a donated portrait which appears to leave a lot to be desired, and does not enjoy the idea of continuing the pressures of wearing the crown. She has abdication on her mind. "Richard II," though, this play is not.

While there are many interesting characters and lines, the plot seems unsure of itself. Where is it going? Who will take it there? What is at stake? There are a lot of interesting side views into the situation, but where is the central look into the hearts of the characters?

The people all seem rather ordinary and yet are thrust into an extraordinary situation with the national spotlight coming their way. Yet one feels that they have been unaffected by the notoriety to which they have been exposed. They are down-to-earth folks with a stronger interest in lipstick ("Fatal Attraction") than nearly any other issue. The name of the lipstick might have been introduced as a leitmotif, but the play fails to develop it as a central symbol.

Oddly, the cover of this book is an illustration of a character doing a dance routine from a musical hall review. It does not seem to illustrate any of the plays in the volume, nor does the style of any of the plays come close to a musical hall review.

The plays all deserve careful attention. They have diverse styles and themes and will appeal to a variety of audiences. Therefore, it is commendable to see this new collection of Kansas plays.

Lauren Friesen
Palo Alto, California

Susan M. Burke and Matthew H. Hill, eds., *From Pennsylvania to Waterloo: Pennsylvania-German Folk Culture in Transition*. Kitchener, Ontario: Friends of the Joseph Schneider Haus, 1991. Pp. 148. ($26.95—paperback) ISBN 0-9695578-0-9

"One that's the same with a difference" was a Mennonite woman's definition of a good quilt according to Lovina Bauman's recollections of the quilt sessions she had been a part of all her life in her conservative Mennonite setting in Ontario. "One that's the same with a difference" is also a most applicable phrase when considering the continuation of Pennsylvania German folk culture in Waterloo County, Ontario.

This attractively produced book instructs and delights in the best sense. It is not an easy coffee table book as a first glance through the richly illustrated pages might suggest. Its content is far-reaching and complex in historical scope and subjects presented by foremost scholars of the field. This book documents the papers presented at the public symposium "Continuity and Change: Pennsylvania-German Folk Culture in Transition," as well as a concluding panel discussion, which compared Mennonite folkways in Pennsylvania and in the Waterloo region within the lifetime memory of the participants. The symposium took place July 4-7, 1991, at the Joseph Schneider Haus museum to honor its 10th anniversary. A concurrent exhibition entitled "Changes in Latitude" presented artifacts from public and private collections from Pennsylvania and from Waterloo County, a first international collaboration on the theme of cultural transplantation and change. Most of the 42 color plates and the 82 black and white illustrations represent objects featured in the exhibition "Changes in Latitude." The artifacts which are presented here, the photo documentation of lifeways, the maps and charts, the range of primary sources and personal experience brought to this ambitious project by the editors and their co-authors reaches back to the middle of the 18th century and embraces the present.

In his foreword Milo Schantz calls this book a celebration of two histories which are also one history, emphasizing that the Mennonite tradition "has been one of discussing, of evaluating the implications of change before venturing into it, rather than simply accepting it. Mennonites do not fear change, but we want to appreciate it, its hazards as well as its promise."

The book documents the transplantation of an ethno-religious culture and the factors that cause continuities as well as changes in this transplantation process. Unlike many Mennonites who came from south Russia to the United States in the 1870s in large groups or as whole communities, Mennonites who came from the Alsace and the Palatinate to Pennsylvania and from there to Ontario came mostly as individuals. But in both cases, a new culture had to be built with each move. While bringing skills and "things from home, things were added from the new environment and things were created spontaneously to meet new needs," as Frederick S. Weiser points out in his introduction.

The material culture of the Pennsylvania homeland and its transplanted manifestation in Waterloo County, Ontario, is placed into historical context by Frederick Weiser's masterfully concise account of Anabaptist Mennonite theological and cultural origins in

Switzerland and Holland, migration and settlements in Montgomery/Bucks and Lancaster counties and still further and farther migrations and settlements in the Niagara Peninsula, Markham district and Waterloo County.

Kenneth McLaughlin then presents the complexity of the immigration history that shaped Waterloo County into "a Pennsylvania-German homeland." His essay provides a critical summary of most recent research in Canadian immigration history and that of Waterloo County in particular. He offers a new interpretation of this material, avoiding "the ethnocentric orientation of traditional historiography" and refocusing on the dynamics of accommodation between the early Mennonite immigrants from Pennsylvania (1800-1835) and the German speaking immigrants from the German confederacy (1830s to 1850s). In Waterloo County "Pennsylvania Germans joined by subsequent immigrants from Germany created a new, German-Canadian identity that we have come to recognize as 'Waterloo County German'."

Mennonite material culture as it manifests this transition in time and space is presented by pairing essays on fraktur arts in Northeastern Lancaster County and in Waterloo County, on textile arts of Lancaster County and of Waterloo County, and on Mennonite foodway arts in Pennsylvania and in Waterloo County, appropriately framed by an essay on Mennonite gardens in Waterloo County.

David R. Johnson, who is a physicist as well as a scholar of Pennsylvania fraktur artists introduces the major types of northeastern Lancaster County fraktur art with one of the best short definitions and history of the art I have encountered. He attributes its demise as a popular form of expression to the 1848 law making the common public school system mandatory.

Michael Bird, professor of religion and eminent scholar of Canadian folk art, concludes his presentation of Waterloo County fraktur art, produced for the most part between 1822 and 1890, by observing that it "takes a conserving rather than creative response to that of its Lancaster County predecessors. There is much omission, considerable simplification, and frequent copying of those Pennsylvania forms brought along or later imported into the Mennonite community in Ontario." His typology of folk-art survival strategies, perpetuation, discontinuation, and reduction. is the organizing principle for his material.

Tandy Hersh's thoroughly documented reconstruction of the textile tradition in one Pennsylvania Mennonite household illustrates the tradition that was taken to Canada. The remarkable household inventory of Christian Eby's estate in Lancaster County, whose textiles and textile-related items are excerpted here, provides the basis for recreating the textile arts environment with which Christian's daughter Elisabeth (1793-1863) would have grown up.

Susan M. Burke, manager/curator of the Schneider Haus in Kitchener, Ontario, documents how Pennsylvania-German decorative textile traditions began to re-emerge in the 1820s, after the difficult years of the pioneer era, as did Waterloo County fraktur art. Toward the end of the 19th century a burgeoning of needlework arts in Waterloo county . . . reflects the climate of relative stability and prosperity the Mennonite community had obtained. This paralleled the type of stability in Pennsylvania at the end of the 18th century that had produced very fine needlework. "Strong traditionalism within the culture, reinforced by a common religion and language and by the geographic isolation of Waterloo, allowed certain textile arts . . . to persist well beyond the period when industrialization was having an impact on the handwork of Pennsylvania . . . cultures."

Nancy Roan, an authority on Mennonite quilts and on Pennsylvania-German cooking uses most effectively unpublished source materials, diaries, account books, store ledgers, inventories and interviews spanning nearly two centuries, from 1818 until 1991, to render a lively account of continuities and changes of the main foodstuffs, recipes and manners of preserving.

Mara Hollands is teacher and interpreter at the Joseph Schneider Haus and her research deals with the medicinal as well as the nutritional aspects of plants grown in the traditional four-square gardens of Mennonite homesteads in the Kitchener area. She provides a comprehensive historical overview from earliest documents in the 1850s until today. She found that "the most changed areas in the garden today is the cultivation of herbs. Most women do not grow many herbs." But she also found the "continuity with the past in the traditions of saving seed which grows out of the deeply held ethic of good stewardship in the community."

This ethic of thriftiness is emphasized as well by Edna Staebler in her conversational, highly personal account of Waterloo County foodways: "Mennonites never waste anything. They use up every single thing in some way or another. They are the best recyclers in the world. They didn't use that word, but they certainly do recycle everything." (I am afraid however that many who call themselves Mennonite still need to live up to this fine compliment.) Edna Staebler is a journalist and author of a series of Canadian cookbooks.

The book concludes with an edited transcription of a lively panel discussion on views of folkways with lay persons of varied Mennonite backgrounds, from Waterloo County and from Lancaster County, on subject matter ranging widely, including family, child raising, schooling, celebrations of the church year, customs relating to death and funerals. Here I was struck by Donald Martin's summing up of Mennonite life: to him it is "the three principles: frugality, simplicity, and brotherhood. Those are the backbone of Mennonitism." Matthew H. Hill, anthropologist, moderated this session and also provides the concluding chapter of the book, discussing continuity and change in context, "as products of decisions made by individuals within particular contexts, contexts which shape the limits of available changes."

I experienced some small inconveniences while making myself familiar with this fine book: there is no bibliography, that is, it is hidden in the endnotes of each essay. For example, I wanted to see whether Nancy Lou

Patterson's work had been referenced by any of the authors. I had to plow through all the endnotes in order to find her name. The index of personal names without subject categories is not helpful for the newcomer to the cultural history discussed in the book. It is not clear on what basis the names in the index were chosen. Only two material culture categories are listed in the index ("fraktur" and "textiles"). Even though the book illustrates furniture, i.e., wardrobes, beds, cradles, chests, a desk, clocks, there is no category for "furniture," nor is there one for "ceramics" or "tin and ironware" which also feature prominently in the illustrations. No concepts other than "Anabaptism" is referenced in the index.

None of the captions of illustrated artifacts indicate their dimensions. For the serious student of continuity and change in material culture traditions, changing dimensions of objects of the same function are often a crucial indicator of cultural change. Furthermore, none of Winslow Fegley's poignant photographic documents of Mennonite lifeways, particularly of food processing, are given dates, nor are most of the other documentary photographs dated—a potential headache for the scholar who wants to use this documentation ten to fifty years from now!

Is it coincidence or a sign of the times that while the curators Susan M. Burke and Matthew Hill carried out this project on change and continuity of a particular Mennonite cultural tradition, the dynamics of its cultural survival in a new setting, the author of this review was at work on a parallel exhibition/symposium/book project, *Mennonite Furniture: A Migrant Tradition 1766-1910*, (co-curated and co-authored with John M. Janzen), namely the study of continuity and change of that branch of Mennonites who transplanted their culture from Poland and Russia to the prairie states of the United States and to the prairie Provinces of Canada. How fruitful it would have been could we have participated in each others' symposia!

From Pennsylvania to Waterloo: Pennsylvania Folk Culture in Transition is a very significant contribution to the study of culture history at large and to Mennonite history in particular, thanks to the vision of the Joseph Schneider Haus museum and to the broad-minded scholarship of the authors.

Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen
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Jeff Gundy, *Inquiries*. Huron, Ohio: Bottom Dog Press, 1992. Pp. 59. ($5.95—paperback) ISBN 0-933087-22-5

The questions Jeff Gundy asks in this new book of poems are—like most questions worth asking—both profound and mundane: How do you explain the love you have for your family? What is beauty? What can you do about a badly coached T-ball team? What should you do? And these poems have answers—at least tentative ones. But like most answers, there are usually more than one per question and most often they conflict. Near the end of the book's first section, a 12-part prose poem about (among other things) the greenhouse effect, the speaker asks, "Can we. . .walk light enough that the grasses lift themselves still whole behind our feet?" The optimistic answer comes immediately: "Ah, we can." But the qualified answer immediately follows that one: "We have no choice but to *think* we can" (italics mine). It's this tension between the romantic and the practical, the believer and skeptic, that gives not just individual poems, but the whole book its energy and truth.

The first half of the book is dark and angry—Inquiries into the Origins of Hate, into the Dialectics of Consumption, into Chainsaws (What do chainsaws love?/ Lumber, dust. Live wood pulled down/by the dying sun on last year's leaves.). In "Inquiries into the Technology of Beauty," the description of nuclear holocaust is lush, ironic, and despairing:

Think of the wonder of the white missiles
arguing gravity into consent. Think of the beauty
of their smooth arc, classical, serene.
Think of the elegant use of space,
the fine metals crafted to silken tolerances,
the chips solving thousands of problems
at once and all gracefully, all beautifully,
all for a love that will spend the world
like a great bouquet of lilies and roses
to bring 'the terrible love of nations'
to you, to you, to you.

Is this beautiful? Yes, of course, if something beautiful only has to be the sum of its technical, aesthetic parts. But it's not beauty itself, at least not the kind synonymous with Truth. And it's nothing less than Keatsian beauty that the book's final poems—the Inquiries into Lightness, Praises, Gifts—are after. What emerges are small things: chickadees, a quiet place in the weeds to sit, an old desk, family, good tools. And beauty? In "Inquiry into the Nature of Beauty, or the Tale of the King of the Cats," beauty becomes "not truth or justice or love," but "something to love."

The ultimate question in the last poems, however, isn't an aesthetic one, or even whether beauty exists in a flawed world (it does), but a theological one: What have we possibly done, given our cruelty and blindness, to deserve beauty? The answer is—nothing; the answer is grace. In one of the book's most moving poems, "Inquiry on the Proposition that All Things Work Together for the Glory of the Father," the speaker of the poem recalls a college professor whose life was difficult, a catalogue of abuse, death, bankruptcy—but a man who could make his students sing "Oh What A Beautiful Morning" (and get away with it), who helped his students "survive." When this professor gives an address at "the old school," we get the book's answer to both the professor's suffering and the speaker's good fortune:

I listened as he mourned his losses,
talked about the incarnation, finally
asked everyone to sing
"When Peace Like a River,"
his voice rising over all the rest
like honey, like the wine
of flowers gathered and pressed
out of pain and time and beauty
that we all might drink somehow,
that we all might live some way
in the grace of things unseen,
in the peace we cannot understand.

It's this grace *Inquiries* searches for, questions, and grudgingly accepts—not

because it's a satisfying answer, but because there's no other answer available.

These are intelligent poems. Gundy's an English professor at Bluffton, and he manages to quote Calvino, Apollinaire, Eliot, Derrida. But the most important voices evoked are two American ones: Frost and Thoreau. Frost, that doubter who, looking in a well, almost sees truth before it is "blurred and blotted out'; Thoreau, all conviction, who crows "I do not to propose to write an ode to dejection, but to brag as lustily as chanticleer in the morning. . .if only to wake my neighbors up." It's between these poles of belief that Gundy's inquiries operate. Serious, ironic, and funny by turns, the voice of these poems is original and challenging, one that speaks our doubts and hopes in the late 20th century.

Keith Ratzlaff
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Rachel and Kenneth Pellman, *A Treasury of Mennonite Quilts.* Intercourse, Pa.: Good Books, 1992. Pp 128. ($19.95) ISBN 1-56148-059-2

This book, *A Treasury of Mennonite Quilts*, is a compelling book. Its stories invite us to enter the world of the quiltmaking, its creator and the period in which the quilt was constructed. The format is inviting; leading the reader into chapters on particular quilt patterns—Stars, Trip Around the World, Bear Paw, Fan, Dresden Plate, Irish Chain, Carolina Lily—only to mention a few.

Not every quiltmaker is adept in the planning or construction of a bed covering but in many cases the charm lies in the design quality and the color selections. The authors, Rachel and Kenneth Pellman, have captured this in the excellent photography of these original quilts. The attractive glossy cover of the "Bleeding Heart" quilt by a Franklin County, Pennsylvania quiltmaker, Mary Ann Grove, instantly attracts the viewer to examine this book further. The fascinating story of this quilt is told on page 60. Molly, as she was affectionately known, spent many hours expertly appliqueing and quilting this masterpiece. She had made the quilt for her hope chest before marriage, her boyfriend rejected her and she never married. The quilt remained stored in the chest until it was sold, along with Mary Ann's other possessions, at a public auction. Fortunately it did not fall into the hands of strangers but was purchased by her first cousin and later passed on to the cousin's daughter.

This, and many other stories document the extraordinary collection of quilts. Friendship stories and their quilt connections is another enticing chapter. "Friendship" constructed about 1930, originated from contacts made by Adam and Sarah Schumacher during their trips from Ohio and Oregon. Daughters Susan and Lydia decided to make a friendship quilt as a gift to their parents. They solicited patches from friends in Ohio and Oregon and eventually received sixty-four squares. The Oregonians listed their names and home towns on the blocks they submitted as well as additional embroidered designs. The end result was a beautiful symbol of community from daughters to their parents.

Crazy quilts have a charm that is a story in itself. A number of examples of this category are illustrated; each are original since the fabrics—cottons, wools, silks, are placed in a random fashion. Many of those photographed include a rich variety of feather-like shapes, grapes, crescents, baskets, and abstract forms. In the center of Sophia Showalter Brubaker's quilt is a stitched Bible, symbolic of the position it held in her life. On either side of the Bible are the initials of the eight children in her family. Initials of her aunts and uncles are scattered elsewhere in this tied comforter. In 1899 Sophia traveled to West Virginia; she commemorated this event by embroidering the name of the state and the date of the trip into one of the squares. Many of the designs were traced from seed catalogs and meticulously stitched with wool thread. The images include life-like renditions of chickens, turkeys, sheep, and a cow plus an assortment of flowers.

Fortunately many Mennonite quilts have been cherished and in time passed down to a family member, and in a number of cases from grandmother to a namesake grandchild. "Ocean Waves" was created by Anna Hess Heller of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania in 1888. Anna made numerous quilts and stored them in the chest instead of using them on beds. Among them was one she made for her two-year old daughter, Laura; Laura's daughter, Anna, knew from the time she was a little girl that she would be the recipient of the chest and treasured quilt. Anna's first child, a daughter born in 1956, was named Laura after her grandmother. Laura, now grown, named her daughter, born in 1984, Anna; thus continuing the matrilineal line of five generations of Anna and Laura.

Many of the Log Cabin quilts illustrated in *A Treasury of Mennonite Quilts* are strikingly different from each other in the use of fabrics, color and block arrangements. As pictured, a black variation can create shimmering energy especially when combined with brilliant colors. Annie Horst Bauman was Old Order Mennonite, and therefore did not wear the bright colors used in her Log Cabin quilt. Yet her love for these colors is obvious in her skillful blend of them. Annie was married in 1902; the border of the quilt is made from the skirt of her navy blue wedding dress.

"Floral Bouquet" pieced by Della Krehbiel appears on page 123. In February 1940 while browsing through a copy of *Country Gentleman* magazine, she noticed the illustration of the "Floral Bouquet" quilt; the pattern was available for sixty cents but instead of spending the money for a pattern Della drew the design of one-inch squares. She pieced the quilt that winter and quilted it with the assistance of aunts. She and Herbert Flickinger of Moundridge, Kansas were married on July 3, 1941. Fifty years later Della challenged the quilters of the McPherson Mennonite Church to duplicate this quilt for the 1991 Kansas

MCC sale. Della again drafted the design and the women of the church assisted with the quilting.

These and many more stories with the photographs of their creators enhance this book, a delightful gift for a wide range of readers and not limited to the quilt enthusiasts. This fascinating book by two known quilt experts brings together a fine collection of 149 unique quilts from Mennonite communities across North America. However, a noticeable gap lies in the fact that only eight of the 149 quilts represented are from the rich source of Prussian/Russian Mennonite quilt makers. There is also an absence of the whole cloth quilts with only two such quilts represented. These whole cloth quilts were often referred to as "Sunday quilts." They are unique in the history of Mennonite quilts because of their beautiful display of intricate linear patterns and plant motifs which gave the quilter an opportunity to display lovely stitches.

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Arthur Paul Boers, *Justice That Heals:A Biblical Vision for Victims and Offenders*. Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1992. Pp. 166. ISBN 0-87303-184-9

Crime and punishment stir powerful emotions in America today, as they have always done in all places and in all times. But there is something unusual about this particular time and place, because we are at a historical peak in crime statistics. And the United States leads the world, or at least that part of the world which keeps careful statistics, in crime.

For every trend there is a counter trend. "Justice That Heals" may be a part of the countering trend which we need to reverse the rising crescendo of horror which has been gathering momentum for several decades.

This is a handbook designed for group study of the various issues and questions we face in our criminal justice system. It is an outgrowth of Mennonite Central Committee activities in the field which have resulted in the establishment of victim offender reconciliation programs in various localities across Canada and the U.S.

Boers is a Mennonite pastor and a volunteer in one of the reconciliation programs who has gained firsthand experience in working with offenders who have been apprehended and victims who have been wronged, to attempt to salvage something useful from the trauma and wreckage often left in the wake of the crime and subsequent legal interventions. We learn from the various vignettes presented in the book it is not only the crime, but what follows after that traumatizes both victim and offender. Often the emotional pain inflicted by the criminal justice process aggravates the injury suffered by the victim and also increases the odds the perpetrator will become a repeat offender.

The conventional answers of longer jail sentences and the death penalty have not resulted in any reversal of the trends. Yet the majority of Americans still support these measures. Perhaps it is our simultaneous expectation of a careful, deliberate due process which robs these old measures of their deterrent value. The slow, often painfully slow, process of trying the accused results in the loss of the connection between crime and punishment in the mind of the offender. Instead, both victim and offender begin to view the "system" as the problem. The victim despairs of obtaining redress, feeling excluded from the process; the offender feels violated by a system which fails in its stated intent to be justly fair to all, and nurses resentment which may later burst forth again.

The biblical approach expounded by Boers to counter the failure of our current method demands a different attitude toward such ideas as retribution and imprisonment. He asks us to consider how our attitudes stack up to New Testament principles. He suggests unlimited love is the principle Christians need to apply to the situation. But he also contends it is a rational, common sense reconsideration of what works and what does not work that is needed for our society.

Many more books and articles—and media sound bites—will be needed to swing the tide of public opinion away from our present disastrous course. But this book is a guide for what Christians working together can do now.

George Dyck
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