

DreamSeeker Magazine

Voices from the Soul



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The Low-Down on Small Talk

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“They Won’t Let Me Cry”:

Becoming a Caring Congregation

Hubert Schwartzentruber

and much more

Summer 2002

Volume 2, Number 3

Editorial: A Holy Mess

This is a true story but let me fuzz the details. A son went to a father and reported the questionable thing he might do when away from home with friends. “How will you feel about that?” wondered the son.

“Let me be clear,” said the father. “It’s against the law and it’s against our family rules.”

“I know, Dad,” said the son. “But if I do it, can I talk to you about it?”

“Yes,” said the father.

“Good,” said the son, “because if I couldn’t talk to you about it then I’d do it anyway but I wouldn’t let you know.”

What that story illustrates is this: We must constantly negotiate how we will live between what could be and what is. Particularly for persons of faith or committed to high ideals, the tension is inevitable, because life is always messier than the ideals.

Issues of DSM are also messier than any theme, but if there is a theme this time, it involves looking squarely at life’s messiness, then experiencing within and not outside the mess whatever holiness is to be found. That’s why this time Paul Schrock’s response to last issue’s focus on mental illness, Leonard Nolt’s poem on change, and my own Kingsview come first—because hopefully they provide doorways through which to enter the explorations that follow of messiness, holiness, or both.

In the following two articles the exploration brushes against death itself, as David Flowers tells of the faces he had to learn to know when cancer took

away his usual face, and as Polly Ann Brown tells of how the manner of her dog’s death taught her next time to trust the voice of her soul.

Then Katie Funk Wiebe both surveys her life from within the messy realities of aging and teaches us to gallop with her, naked, in the night—some-

times, perhaps, through the labyrinths Elizabeth Raid describes as helpful to her journey through midlife. Meanwhile Valerie Weaver-Zercher looks again at the small talk she has maligned and now sees in its humdrum ordinariness hints of so much more, even as poet Jeremy Frey sees much in a Wis-sahickon stream.

Ever criss-crossing messiness and holiness are the church and also our walks of faith. We see this as Hubert Schwartzenruber explains what he learned about church from a girl forbidden messy tears. And we see it as Randy Klassen invites us to take on a lived, not just doctrinal, Jesus shape, after which Dan Hertzler explores the presence and absence of a Jesus shape in a Mennonite community studied by John Ruth.

Topping it all off, Dave Greiser uses film to bore in on the nature of reality itself. On the back cover Nolt chills us with parallels between today and when Anabaptists were executed for their beliefs. And Noël King sends us back out the door laughing, one of the better ways to find joy within the mess, by reporting on the “woman distracted by work on the job.”

—Michael A. King

We must constantly negotiate how we will live between what could be and what is.

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Response

I applaud the theme of the *DSM* Spring 2002 issue discussing emotional illnesses. Eight years ago I hit bottom and stayed there a long time. I could no longer pray. God seemed distant. My life spun out of control.

At Mennonite Publishing House I had agreed to manage both the Herald Press Books and the Congregation Literature Divisions. I was in over my head. Morale was low, with turf battles among staff. Finances were strained. I had to terminate the job of a veteran employee prominent in our denomination.

I began exhibiting bizarre behavior. Sometimes I had grandiose ideas, great energy, spoke endlessly, ate lots of food, and generated long e-mails. Other times I was in the pit of gloom, darkness, and despair. A cloud hung over me. I could no longer approach my desk or even the MPH building without severe anxiety seizing me. I could not sleep at night, longing for the day. I could not face daytime, longing for the night. Life no longer seemed worth living.

No one enjoys admitting defeat, nor did I. Extreme stress, I learned, can lead to a heart attack, a stroke, or an emotional breakdown. Mine was the latter. Unfortunately, a heart attack or a stroke is more socially acceptable.

How do you react to words like *crazy, mentally ill, emotionally unbalanced, or manic-depressive?* And how about *nervous breakdown, bipolar disorder, generalized anxiety?* These labels fit me.

My wife, June (Bontrager), was supportive, as were the two local pastors, Linford Martin and John Sharp. My daughter, Andrea, came from eastern Pennsylvania to be with us in the crisis. Consensus led to professional intervention. The hardest thing I have ever done was to commit myself voluntarily to the locked psychiatric wards at Philhaven Hospital near Hershey, Pennsylvania.

My activities were planned and closely monitored each day by the psychiatric team. I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder (manic-depressive) disease and generalized anxiety. Medications began to control chemical malfunctions in my brain.

After my release, I gradually worked more hours and resumed going to Kingview Mennonite Church. Again I could recognize God's Spirit in my life. June never wavered in her love and emotional support. This is an extremely demanding role for a spouse to play. The trauma both to June and me was greater than most can ever know. But God has brought us through all of this to a good place again.

People who suffer an emotional illness cannot pick themselves up by their bootstraps and move on. They often need medication and therapy. As Christians in caring communities, we can be supportive, nonjudgmental, allowing them time to heal. And God will do God's part.

—Paul M. Schrock

Menno Simons Thinks About Change,

pushing
his fingers
through
graying hair,
and shaking
his head;
church buildings,
not caves to
worship in,
with no guard
posted at the
entrance:
sunday schools,
space travel,
skyscrapers,
materialism, and
MBA's,
tank tops and TV,
also (with a
slight shiver),
soldiers and
homosexuals
seeking church
membership, and the
most massive
change of all,
his own, from the
high society of
Catholic
priesthood to
seditious,
outlaw,
Anabaptist,
fugitive.

—Leonard Nolt, *Boise, Idaho, is a photographer and writer. He has had poetry, fiction, articles, and photographs published in such magazines as Rhubarb, cold-drill, Fellowship, Poetry in Public Places, Mennonite Life, Gospel Herald, Builder, Idaho Wildlife, and more.*

The Trip to Walmart

Michael A. King

To this day, notwithstanding the heresies I am about to write, I flinch from the Walmartization of America and increasingly the world (now that Walmart is the largest company in it). Let no one construe the story I am about to tell as indicating otherwise. But somehow I just keep getting older and life just keeps getting more complicated, and so I am going to tell a tale in which ideals clash with realities in ways I have yet to disentangle.

So I won't try, except to say just quickly here, then let the story speak for itself, that the trip to Walmart did make me think this: Maybe we must live life as it is, in all its messy grandeur, and not only life as we think it should be, and accept that one of life's great challenges is how to negotiate between what is and what could be.

The Walmart saga begins in the early 1990s. I had resigned several years earlier as pastor of Germantown Mennonite Church in Philadelphia but our family continued to live nearby. We then commuted from our urban setting to church involvements at Salford Mennonite Church in the Harleysville area of southeastern Pennsylvania. As urban dwellers we loved the city but were also quite taken with the contrasting beauty of Harleysville's bucolic, rolling pastures and

woodlots. Eventually we settled into them, in a home a few minutes from the Salford congregation.

We then watched in horror as thousands more people had the same idea, turning our area into yet one more of those fast-growing communities seemingly hell-bent on replacing pristine land with developments whose countrified names like Fox Trot, Creekside, Rolling Farms were about all that remained of the reality they replaced.

Then came the humdinger. Right there on what had been the farm of the Kulp, members of our very own congregation, Walmart planned to build one of its temples to American consumerism. Our family fumed and fulminated about the travesty and would have sworn, if Mennonites swore. But we don't swear, since Jesus told us to let our yea be yea and our nay be nay, so we just very very passionately affirmed that we would never ever darken the doors of that den of iniquity except maybe to take in some whips and drive out the moneychangers at the cash registers.

Then groundbreaking came and day by day, with grief and anger, we watched the Walmart walls go up. We dreaded the day when its doors would open and the hungry hordes would stampede in, trampling over all the local businesses about to be destroyed, as so many have been, when Walmart

sucked all their customers into its slobbering maw.

Finally came the day of infamy for the Harleysville area. I forget whether our collapse came that day or a few days later, but it came so quickly as to give no evidence at all that we did in fact have functional Walmart antibodies.

I remember yet, with a shiver, the look on our family members' faces as we saw for the first time, right there in our backyard on this former Mennonite farm, the Walmart smiley faces

and heard the defining words of our era, "Welcome to Walmart." The sad truth is this: What was on our faces was something almost like awe combined with whatever crumpling effect a face gives off when values thought to be for life prove to be about as strong as toilet paper. We liked Walmart and we were horrified to realize this. That was what our faces were trying to

register.

I could go on, detail upon detail, to tell of how for weeks or maybe even months we managed at least to say we disagreed with our behavior as we indulged in it, but why belabor the sordid truth? The fact is, in no time at all we were shopping at Walmart constantly, and we've never quit.

Then came last week *the* trip to Walmart that stirred this column into being. I had had a rotten few weeks be-

cause I had changed computers several times and spent day after day configuring computers while work piled up. Oh, computers, e-mail, Internet, speeding everything up, taking away from us the gentle pacing of life like it was lived on the Kulp farm before Walmart came. . . .

But that's another story, except to say that amid computer woes (I'm writing on my new computer, which now every time I boot up flashes a warning that the hard disk is going to crash any minute, but I don't have enough minutes to worry about it until it happens), I had done an even worse job than usual of figuring out how to get everything done and still find enough peace in my soul at the end of the day to cherish my family. I felt a constant undercurrent of sadness at how quickly all my daughters were growing up, next one headed to college in months, and how often I wasn't sharing the journey with them.

But one evening the spell of busyness, for reasons I'm not entirely clear about, lifted. For a few shining hours I didn't care about all that was not getting done. Meanwhile Katie was getting this and that ready for her big high school senior prom and Kristy, home from college, was enjoying the sisterhood of helping her get ready. In the midst of their brainstorming, they decided mostly on a lark to head off to Walmart to get some little something. Sensing I was feeling wild, they asked, "Dad, do you want to go with us?" I decided to just go crazy, live it up, and head off with them.

So, practically giggling with the giddiness of it all, I fear, we raced out

to Katie's car, since this was really her trip and she wanted to be the driver both literally and symbolically. My dear daughters put me in the back seat, where I've rarely been when with them.

They put some kind of really loud teenage-type music on, that stuff with none of the haunting beauty to it that music had before computers and Walmart, and after all the times I've told her about how she's going to kill herself doing it, Katie went down our country road (there *is* still a little country behind Walmart and between the developments) at I don't know how many miles over the speed limit. But I was in the back seat and she was in charge, so after protesting and getting back her claim that it really was no faster than I'd be driving, which was too true, I shut up.

And I noticed a lot of things I hope I never forget. I noticed what it felt like to be in a car (remember the world when there were just horses on farms that are now Walmart?) in the backseat while the wind on that late spring day blew back my daughters' hair to reveal the grinning faces of these two whose diapers I had changed (a reminder they never appreciate) as we flew on our wild trip.

Right in the middle of it all the world outside or at least inside me twisted on its axis and I caught my breath, because it was just as clear as it had ever been to me that we were in a holy moment. If I could just stay within it, I was being given a gift of gifts, the blessing of for those few moments truly seeing my daughters and the en-

tire world as they and I were intended to be but so rarely are.

Perhaps partly because it truly is majestic and mystical and also partly just because it's different to my eyes and so not yet spoiled by taken-for-grantedness, the landscapes of the American West take my breath away. Often in humdrum moments my mind wanders to the sere highlands of Nevada; the wild-flower carpets once glimpsed in the Anza-Borrego wildlands of southern California; the lonesome delights of old Route 66 on the way to Kingman, Arizona, from which sometimes can be spied far off in the distance, across Native American tribal land, hints of this strange high ledge, and if you were to drive toward it some 20 or 30 miles more you would realize it was the North Rim of the Grand Canyon.

There on that trip to Walmart, with the landscape of ordinary old Morwood Road flashing by in the cool air under the fading twilight sun, with Katie laughing at the wheel and

Kristy chattering beside her, the world lurched and the feeling of being in the West leaped right into my heart here in the humdrum East. I could see that day-to-day world as if for the very first pristine time, and it was lovely beyond even the words I'm trying to draw on to describe it.

Then we arrived at Walmart, there on top of the old Kulp farm, and we all wondered aloud again at this delight we were deriving from a little trip to bad Walmart, and we didn't know what to do, because we hate Walmart but we love it. So we just lived on in a strange world where things often don't hang together, where an awful lot goes wrong, where if we pave over too many more farms what will be left, and we thrilled to the joy of just being alive with each other in the mess.

—*Michael A. King, Telford, Pennsylvania, is pastor, Spring Mount (Pa.) Mennonite Church; and editor, DreamSeeker Magazine.*



Faces

David M. Flowers

I think we all wear different faces during our daily lives, which reflect the changing roles we play at different points in time. We are, variously, parents, nurses, homemakers, office staff, factory workers, physicians, and more in our interactions with other people, many times changing our expressions and demeanor in mere seconds to accommodate new thoughts or the play of emotions.

Nonetheless, there is a reassuring familiarity to our overall physical appearance that greets us each morning from the bathroom mirror. I think this solidity, this sameness, is an important bedrock which allows us to confront the uncertainties of each day's adventures.

Over long periods our appearance does begin to alter, and it is with a sense of wonderment that we confront the new wrinkles and graying hair that mark the onset of older age. These change are slow, however, and rarely have an impact on day-to-day thoughts. We get up, brush our teeth, comb our hair, and move on with the day's activities, having checked our appearance fleetingly, if at all, in the mirror before work.

I, too, have been part of this group—a husband, father, physician falsely reassured by the apparent predictability of daily routine. But then I developed can-

cer. Along with all the emotional trauma and physical discomfort, the chemotherapy has changed my physical appearance as well as the psychological mask that lies beneath.

As I look back at old photographs of my youth, I am struck by an inordinate excess of hair. When my family watched an old John Travolta movie, the children laughed at the clothes and the hairstyles. Reluctantly my wife and I smiled and nodded: "Yes, we looked like that." In these photos I am forever marked as a child of the 1970s, in the same ways as the Brady Bunch stylistically remain frozen on their nightly reruns for all eternity. As expected, my youthful face did not display any worries or concerns. The future seemed endless and unbounded. Optimism prevailed. It was an idyllic time. The youthful face.

When I went to medical school, I felt I needed a more mature look. I grew the beard that was to mark me for the next two decades. I remember as a student walking into a patient's room and being asked if I was there to change the bed. "No" I explained, "I am the doctor." By growing a beard I added a few years and, perhaps, fooled a few patients.

Over time, however, that face became my new reality. I became decisive, confident in my responsibilities. I became a husband and then father. Work remained my primary focus. I relished the role of breadwinner.

Every now and then my wife would plead for a little more family

time but I explained that I was providing for us with my 80-hour workweek. I developed some new wrinkles and some more gray hair, but each morning my face greeted me in the bathroom with the reassurance that together we could "get the job done."

I was serious but with a veneer of humor because of the good times. My children understood that medicine was important and sometimes required them to take a back seat. They could tell by the look on my face. The serious face.

Cancer dramatically changed my physical appearance as well as my underlying psychological support. Chemotherapy made me completely bald, with loss of eyebrows as well as beard in a matter of weeks. I spent long hours staring at my new reflection in the mirror, trying to find myself behind the stranger who stared back.

My response to the world changed as well. I became somewhat withdrawn and timid, uncertain of which steps to take to get through the day. No longer as confident, I began to depend on my wife to help make decisions. It seemed as if an outer-space creature had taken over my place in the world. Where had my life gone? It was an unsettled time, with the dawning realization that it would remain so forever. It was hard to see below the surface. An alien face.

With remission, I now wear a new face. With gray, curly hair but smooth skin, I am curiously both old and

Cancer dramatically changed my physical appearance as well as my underlying psychological support.

young at the same time. I have emerged a different person from my ordeal. I have decided not to grow back my beard. This is a new era for me; therefore, a new look seems appropriate.

Underneath, my emotional features have also changed. My view of the world is different. I am more patient but less certain. I work part time. I spend more time with my family. I wait for an uncertain future that no longer stretches endlessly before me. And yet, I cannot say I see the end. A waiting face.

As I look at all of my photos, I can see the progression of both inner and outer faces changing together over time: the youthful face of unbounded enthusiasm, the serious face with its underlying confidence, the alien face of uncertainty, and the waiting face forged from patience. But beneath all of this, I believe there is a deeper level still. There is a unity, which binds my selves together through their passage in time, a core being whose face and

identity has metamorphosed from the struggles of age but still harkens back to the seeds of my youth.

Throughout my troubles one thing that I have noticed is that my friends and family have always treated me the same. Their love and support have been unwavering, regardless of my appearance. There has been no doubt in their response as to who I am. Perhaps I have been too shallow? I have seen what I appear, but have I missed what I am? I now believe that I have chosen the wrong surface in which to look for my reflection.

In the mirror of my children's eyes, I see that my true face has remained unchanged.

—*David M. Flowers, Telford, Pennsylvania, is a cardiologist on staff at Grand View Hospital in Sellersville, Pennsylvania. He is currently disabled from clinical practice but, as a result, has been able to become a more active father to his three teenage children.*



This Above All

Musings After the Death of a Dog

Polly Ann Brown

How are we educated by children, by animals!—Martin Buber

I am haunted by the feeling that I have allowed something besides my little dog, Cinder, to slip away. I click through the sequence of events leading to her death like rosary beads. I am in search of some nagging thing. I figure, in time, I will be able to isolate it from the pure grief that follows naturally the loss of a trusted friend.

Cinder was 11 when diagnosed with lung disease. My neighbor, a veterinarian, offered to euthanize her at home.

“When do we do it?” I asked.

“You’ll know,” she said, adding, “I don’t believe in hospice for dogs.”

We were going away for the summer. I hinted to my husband that maybe we could take Cinder with us. His look I took for an answer. I told myself it would be too hard on Cinder—the long trip, the adjustment to apartment living. Our plans were made: we had commitments. With the date of our departure approaching, Cinder’s breathing seemed more labored. I called the vet and asked if I could give Cinder a pill to relax

her. The vet replied that no, she would give Cinder a tranquilizer by injection before putting her down. “It’s a painless, peaceful process,” she said.

It was not a painless, peaceful process. Cinder yelped at the needle’s stab, wailed over the ache of medicine seeping through deep muscle. The vet was chagrined. “I’m used to big dogs,” she explained.

My friend and I buried Cinder beneath a boxwood in the backyard. My friend said, “You did the right thing. You couldn’t go off for the summer and leave her with someone when she was so sick. You had a deadline.”

I mentioned the injection. I couldn’t shake it off.

“It’s a brain snag,” my friend noted. “It’s part of grief. If your brain wasn’t snagging on the injection, it would find something else to snag on.” “Let it go,” my friend said each time I brought it up.

The next day my husband and I drove to our summer apartment. The further we pushed on in the car, the more I felt like I was being vacuumed up by a powerful riptide, sucked out to sea.

Adrift for weeks, I become, by turns, sad and numb yet curiously waiting for an answer without even knowing the question. I turn to writers who give me the bad news, who ask questions that make me feel as if I can breathe no matter how in over my head I am. That’s how hearing bad news affects me right now. I don’t want cheering up.

“It’s rough out there and chancey,” declares Annie Dillard. “Cruelty is a mystery,” she writes, after vividly de-

tailed the consumption of a small frog by a giant water beetle. In the Koran, Allah asks, “The heaven and the earth and all in between, thinkest thou I made them *in jest?*” Annie Dillard says, “It’s a good question.”

I am like a castaway facing the starkest of realities, asking the most basic of questions, needing to begin again, critiquing everything I have said I believe.

We go to church and my brain snags on the words the preacher uses to identify himself. “I am an Orthodox Presbyterian,” and of this way of presenting himself, says, “It doesn’t get any better.” Through the years, I have crossed many denominational boundaries and have heard (and used) words that, in one form or another, create “us” and “them.” I leave, walk away, knowing I will never return to this church.

There is a seed of future promise in my bottom-line existence, my newfound determination to let go of anything that no longer rings true or fair. Like the Velveteen Rabbit, I want to become real. Nothing short of honesty will do.

In this phase of radical reflection, looking back over my life, I see how I leaped from one movement to another, took on large calamities, systemic injustices: a famine in Ethiopia, racism in the United States, misuse of the medical model in education in students’ lives, a war in the Gulf.

I notice, now, that in all of these, there had to be a villain, someone to blame and dehumanize. There were two sides, a right side and a wrong side. I was on the right side, the side of

justice. In my pursuit, there was no capacity for imagining the merit in the other side. Another thing I notice: All those battles were waged on behalf of someone else's well-being, never my own.

My world shrinks as I think about how I sometimes treat the person in front of me. I judge and criticize my husband without trying to imagine where he is coming from. I don't have the courage to tell my mother something she doesn't even know is still a barrier between us. I bite my tongue when one of my grown children almost pleads with me to speak. I can't even manage my dog's demise without bungling.

A wise woman I know asks me, "And why would you expect to find peace and justice outside if it can't be in your tiny group, between you and the one in front of you?" It's a good question.

I remember the exact location, the intersection where, 20 years ago, in a car, a friend, dying of cancer, said, "I never question God." We rode on in silence.

I have never known how to reconcile the reality of suffering—the Holocaust, Hiroshima—with the notion of an all-powerful, all-loving, a totally in-charge, sovereign God.

And then, while rehashing how it went with Cinder's death, a friend says, "Sounds as if it wasn't your choice." The words stoke their way

into some inmost nerve. After she leaves, I think about what she has said.

I could have stayed with Cinder until she could not longer put her head down for lack of breath, or decided that, under no circumstances, would I let her suffer that much. There are moments I should drop

It's possible I could have given Cinder two more fairly decent months. . . . I'll never know: I accepted other's views, looked around, failed to look within. I yielded when I didn't want to yield, gave up my own authority (and secretly blamed those to whom I had yielded).

everything—
Stop right here!—
take all the time I need to think about what another says and what I think. When the vet said she didn't believe in hospice for dogs was such a moment.

And how is it that a look becomes a factor in my decision-making? My husband is a reasonable man. I could have arranged for Cinder to spend the summer with us. And why didn't I insist on giving Cinder something by mouth to relax her?

My hunches are usually good ones. It's possible I could have given Cinder two more fairly decent months, or longer. I'll never know: I accepted other's views, looked around, failed to look within. I yielded when I didn't want to yield, gave up my own authority (and secretly blamed those to whom I had yielded).

Cinder was my dog. This was no time for compromise. I betrayed Cinder. I betrayed myself. This was a time, is time, to step up to the plate!

"This above all:" said Shakespeare, "to thine own self be true, And it must follow, as the night, the day, Thou canst not then be false to any man."

Thomas Merton asked himself what he feared most. His answer: "Forgetting and ignorance of the inmost truth of my being. To forget who I am, to be lost in what I am not, to fail my own inner truth, to get carried away in what is not true to me, what imposes itself on me from the outside."

In the church, I have heard little of what Shakespeare and Merton are pointing to here. I have been well-schooled in the need to love and to serve, that it is better to give than to receive.

Yet biblical *shalom* is about right relationships with God, self, and others. And right relationships are about justice: genuine mutuality and reciprocity, knowing and being known. Summing up the law and the prophets, Jesus said, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

This is not the way of duty or one-sided paternalism, ways which often

barely hide subliminal hostility, resentment, a sense of superiority.

Huckleberry Finn, believing he'd go to hell for helping his friend Jim, a slave, journey toward freedom, said, "Alright then, I'll go to hell." At the most, knowledge of self, claiming one's own authority, commitment to one's own heart, to God's heart, might mean laying one's life down for another.

At the least, it might mean making the best possible choices about the care of another.

How like my dog Cinder to drive the point home.

—Polly Ann Brown lives in Philadelphia with her husband, Ken. They are members of Norristown (Pa.) New Life Mennonite church. Polly Ann, a semi-retired educator, is writing a children's book and planning another book encouraging ongoing dialogue among communities, families, educators, and students. She is housebreaking a new puppy. Lois Schlabach, the friend referred to above, deserves thanks for comments that improved the article.



Galloping, Naked, in the Night

Katie Funk Wiebe

On life's vast ocean diversely we sail, Reason the card, but Passion is the gale.—Pope, Moral Essays

My daughter Christine moved from Chicago, where she had lived and worked for 10 years, to Wichita, where I live, to be closer to family. The move was more traumatic than she had expected. One day, as we were having dinner together, she reflected that when a person moves from one locality to another, she loses her identity. Here in Wichita, no one knew the real Christine—creative, eager for friendships, highly motivated, organizer and list-maker, and lover of celebration and beauty. She was only a name, a blip on a mental screen, momentarily passing in and out of people's consciousness. Her self-esteem suffered as a consequence until she found her niche again.

Christine put into words some of my unspoken thoughts. After finishing 24 years of teaching at a small church college, I moved from a small community of three thousand to Wichita, an urban center with a population of over 300,000, to be closer to my children. In the little town I had an identity with most people as a single professional woman. In Wichita I was unknown in my neighborhood and in my

church—probably another little single white-haired woman among other little single white-haired women expected to merge without a murmur into church life.

At any transition, such as marriage, parenthood, or new job, our self-identity is up for review. Moving into the junior branch of the senior division of the Funk clan meant a change in how family members viewed my identity. I saw them as thinking Aunt Katie, teacher and writer, was now Aunt Katie, *retired* teacher and writer, who had joined the group of people saying publicly, "I have finished my main work in life."

For me this transition meant sorting through previous identities to see if I could find one I could accept now. But it also meant letting go of those previous roles and self-images that had once sustained me. It meant possibly accepting a brand new role and self-identity appropriate to this time of life. That looked like a terrifying challenge.

In *Looking Both Ways*, David J. Maitland advises that those facing a new stage in life should not let the discomfort of this transition pass without giving it attention. In other words, we shouldn't try to get over it like a cold, with lots of bed rest and fluids. He advises older adults to use this transition as one more chance at self-knowledge in an encounter with God. He speaks of this transition as God's invitation to move beyond pre-

occupation with one's self-image or identity (What am I now that I'm no longer a teacher?) to the search for self-knowledge. There is no way back.

I hesitantly accepted that my current discomfort with what was going on in my life existed to encourage me to find out more about myself and the passage I was entering. Struggling with holy discomfort hadn't been on my list of things to do as I adjusted to city living. Yet I tried to keep in mind the words of an older friend that old age is the proving ground of whatever one has believed, thought, and said.

The faith issue at transitions, Maitland writes, is the death of previous self-images for the sake of the possibility of the resurrection of a new image appropriate to the new age. But the transition is difficult because what we want to know about ourselves does not exist out there fully developed, like a new version of something already familiar. It became clear to me that the new identity I was looking for was not like the update of last year's car model. The emerging truth about myself might disturb me and take me in surprising directions.

I thought about Maitland's words for days. The death of old self-images he was referring to didn't mean discarding all previous identities. Rather, it meant sorting through previous roles and identities to find a new

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whole. I began to see that the process was like going through my clothes closet and taking a hat from one pile, a dress from another, shoes from yet another, and buying some new accessories, then discarding the leftovers. But even that wasn't a good enough analogy, for that was merely a makeover of an old version of me.

Self-image, self-esteem, identity, or even role—these were not words I grew up with. Who worried during the Depression and war years about whether you had a good self-image or a bad one or whether you were fulfilling your role in life? Back then, there was no anguished daily measuring of self-esteem as there is today. We all knew people who were shy and withdrawn and lived on the fringes of life and also people who were loud-mouthed, mean-spirited, and obnoxious. These latter had “big heads,” our parents told us. And then there were a lot of decent people in between who probably had reasonable self-esteem. Circumstances, very often, rather than personal decisions, determined what you did in life.

Looking back, I sense that I had a fairly good sense of myself, or self-image, using today's language. The middle child, I wasn't given undue responsibility or excess babying. I did well in school, which helped my self-image. I could handle almost any school assignment and kept trying until I had succeeded.

I enjoyed reading; in fact, I inhaled books. I became desperate if I didn't have a book to read, which happened too often in that book-poor community. For me, one of the most

wonderful moments of my childhood was to arrive breathless at the Searle Grain Elevator, which sponsored a rural lending library program, when the most recent wooden chest of books arrived. Often, in my presence, the elevator agent pried off the lid with a monstrous crowbar to uncover several dozen books. And I was first to choose a book. The moment was awesome. Excellent for the self-image.

The teen years passed without many upheavals. I became infatuated with one or more boys periodically, but since Dad and Mother had pronounced a no-flirting, no-dating ultimatum, the infatuation remained mine to dream about, not do anything about. I printed my name beside that of the current boy I liked, crossed out identical letters, then counted off the rest to “He loves me, he loves me not.” Boys were such delightful creatures, and I think I saw myself as delightful too.

Somehow, when I was about 16, I managed to scrape together enough money to buy a royal blue velvet beanie with two feathers sweeping high. The hat rested confidently on my long, blonde, page-boy-styled hair, and the feathers danced jauntily as I walked. It attracted and aroused the passions of a young man I later couldn't get rid of, but I took pride in knowing it had attracted him. No poor self-image at this time either.

After high school I left home to attend a technical college to learn typing, stenography, and bookkeeping. The feathers on the hat and my spirit drooped during those months. I had

wanted to attend university. But the schools weren't handing out humanities scholarships during the war years, only a few for study in military-related areas, such as the sciences. I received a small scholarship in physics when I wanted one in the humanities. I declined it.

Teachers had tried to dissuade me from going to a technical school to learn typing and shorthand. Anyone could do that. The summer of my senior year in high school I had been awarded the Saskatchewan governor-general's medal. It told me I had potential. I had a future. But potential needed money, and my family had none. Business school and sitting at a typewriter, transcribing someone else's words, seemed a life sentence.

I gritted my teeth as I studied Gregg shorthand and took speed typing tests to get out of that technical institute as quickly as possible. I had determined that business courses were for the less able student. And I was smart. As soon as a student's skills were up to a certain level, he or she could leave. When I could type 80 words a minute on a manual typewriter and take shorthand at 120, I left to take myself off Dad's hands, who I knew was sacrificing to enable me to get even six months' education in this institution.

But that still didn't mean much. I endured four months of being an order clerk for a meat distributing plant. My self-image plunged even lower. The good life was not coming as fast as I had expected. My job was to accept telephone orders for meat products such as bologna, wieners, lunchmeat.

I have described myself elsewhere as being a “bologna god.” When it came to distributing this much-wanted type of cold cut, I had full jurisdiction.

Sitting in my cubbyhole, perched on my stool, I read the help-wanted ads and plotted how to get out of this humiliating experience, where my co-workers were rough-and-ready workers, albeit good-natured and given to much teasing. In a few months, I had located a legal secretary's job in a downtown office. No more bologna-god life for me.

I became a bookkeeper/stenographer. I worked lawyer's hours, which meant an extra 15 minutes at noon and shorter hours in summer when the court was not in session. I learned how to file, take shorthand for several days to have plenty to do when my employer was gone, keep the firm's books, type accurately even with 15 carbons, and accept responsibility. I was in charge of the office when my lawyer/employer was absent. To this day I can hardly slit open an envelope without automatically turning it inside out after I have taken out the letter to make sure nothing else is enclosed.

Good self-image? Clearer identity? Yes, I think so. I learned I could handle responsibility for the entire office, even dealing with older employees. I was respected for what I could do, and in the process I gained a good deal of self-respect.

I didn't enjoy one aspect of the work in this law office because it took me back into that aspect of life I was

trying to move above—lower-class poverty. It was also my first encounter with the elderly poor. Once a month I was assigned to collect rents at an ancient tenement house our firm managed, occupied mostly by single male old-age pensioners.

When I entered the battered tin-covered building, I first knocked at the door of cheerful, chubby-cheeked Tom Wilkinson, resident caretaker. He reminded me of a weathered cherub who had stepped out of a Charles Dickens novel. He pushed his fat little legs up and down the halls hollering, “Rent! Rent!” while I, in the role of official rent collector, seated myself at a paint-chipped table shoved against the burlap wainscoting to wait for the tenants. I too felt I was from a Dickens novel.

One by one the men, often unshaven, shuffled toward my table in their worn slippers, wearing nondescript pants over graying long-handled underwear and no shirt, to hand me their six or seven dollars, all in one dollar bills or change. Sometimes they were embarrassed to find a young woman acting as landlord this month. They returned to their small cubicles to lie on narrow cots and listen to the radio and heat a tin of soup or beans on a kerosene burner.

That period of nearly three years after high school was fairly directionless, yet lived in a happy-go-lucky style. I had no goals because I wasn’t actually expected to have any. And anyway, a young woman’s main aim should be to find a husband.

I was treading water, waiting for romance, marriage, and family—un-

til the Christ of the Damascus road caught up with me and asked me who was Lord of my life. Then I turned in a different direction. And the much dating, movie-going, and activity for activity’s sake became not so much wrong as meaningless. Knowing the direction one is going does wonders for one’s identity. I left the law firm and went to Bible college for two years to learn more about God’s Word and ministry.

My study of myself shifts to the time I became a wife, shortly thereafter a mother, then, after 15 years, a widow and single parent at age 38. I recall one new widow lamenting to me she didn’t want to be called the humiliating term *widow*. Yes, widowhood was a stepping down, back, and away from society. Earning a living for a family of four children, going to school, and looking after the children meant daily encounters with few successes and many defeats.

My self-esteem dipped to its lowest as I recognized I was viewed as “a poor widow with four young children,” with emphasis on the “poor” and “young.” Every story and novel I had read about widows and experiences I had had with them came to mind. None were good. And I shuddered to think that this might be my identity until I died.

Many widows struggle with finding a new social role as a manless woman in a coupled society. I struggled mostly with discovering who I was when I was no longer Mrs. Walter Wiebe (which is the way married women were known in those days),

under my husband’s loving care and protection.

The question I am most often asked is what kind of person I would have become had my husband lived. The questioners are thinking of widows they know who have blossomed after their husband’s death. I don’t know the answer. I hope I would have grown and developed my gifts. But it is also possible I might have been content to hide behind my husband’s role and position.

With my husband’s death, I had lost my own identity as surely as if I had lost my name. Looking back to those days, I see a woman who was determined not to stay on the bottom rung but who crawled two steps forward and one step back until gradually I began to forge a new identity as a college teacher and a writer on serious topics.

Now out of these various identities, what have I learned about myself? Self-evaluation is more than accumulating a record of experiences, like a collection of salt and pepper shakers, but evaluating them and learning from them. As I rethink my adult life, I acknowledge I once looked down on anyone who was single, poor, scholastically disadvantaged, and old. I didn’t want to associate with such people lest some of what they were might rub off on me. My attitude changed, however, when I was single again, living on a limited income, vocationally dis-

advantaged, and socially a leftover in a coupled society.

In Peter Shaffer’s play *Equus*, Martin Dysart, a psychiatrist, is trying to learn why his young disturbed patient blinded the eyes of several valuable horses with a metal spike. He learns that, before the blinding incident, the boy occasionally took the horses at

night to the shore and, riding them bareback and naked, raced at top speed.

The boy has been telling Dysart, “At least I galloped. When did you?” The psychiatrist is forced to acknowledge that the boy did something he had never allowed himself to do—know passion. He tells Alan’s parents, “He was dangerous, and could be again, though I doubt

it. But that boy has known a passion more ferocious than I have felt in any second of my life. And let me tell you something: *I envy it.*”

At least for one hour when the young boy was racing along the shore, Alan was living with passionate freedom, “howling in a mist,” freed of life’s common inhibitions. The psychiatrist had lived with boredom and routine, never approaching the edge. He hadn’t kissed his wife in six years. The boy’s actions asked questions he had avoided all his professional life.

I recognize now, as I look back over my many experiences, that I have known too much fear. I have been too

I have known too much fear. I have been too hesitant at times to move ahead. I have seen a ferocious lion behind every blade of grass. . . . If I have learned anything about myself as I look back, it is how little I have galloped at breakneck speed.

hesitant at times to move ahead. I have seen a ferocious lion behind every blade of grass. Something of my father's apprehension about other people and how they might respond to me has rubbed off like indelible ink. Reading books about aging causes me to believe that many older people regret that, to keep life controllable, they lived life too cautiously, held their cards too close to their chests.

I wish now that I had had more courage to move forward decisively and been less concerned about what the church community would think of some of the vision I felt entrusted with. I wish I had written more frankly, more furiously, more forcefully. And yet I know readers have told me that they have admired my gutsiness in opening issues, reaching for truth. But only I know how much I held back—deleting words, lines, paragraphs—to keep myself in safe harbors.

If I have learned anything about myself as I look back, it is how little I have galloped at breakneck speed, how little I have known passion for truth and justice, not even as my father knew passion for the downtrodden. When he saw suffering, he hurt with the person and did what he could to help with his limited means. He anguished over the violence and killing in the world but felt helpless and sometimes concerned about what the people would think of him, an uneducated immigrant storekeeper, speaking out. I, a woman in a man's church world, was also afraid of "What will the peo-

ple think?" I very much wanted to be liked.

At times I spoke out against issues I felt strongly about, but not with the boldness of a Martin Luther King Jr., or an Archbishop Romero, or even a Maggie Kuhn (who founded the Gray Panthers). My concern about the inadequacy of either/or answers, about the cruelty of intolerance, about the chains of rigidity, was sometimes lost between the lines. Kierkegaard said, "Reflection is usually the death of passion." Was my inherent reflective nature the leaching of my passion?

I may not have lavishly celebrated the beauty and glory of God, of God's creation, of life and love and beauty and truth. Too often I was thinking only about getting through the day, of dealing with my unique pain. And like others I became outraged, not at important things, but at the length of boys' hair and girls' skirts, at the pre-emption of a favorite television program for sports, or at the dog barking next door all night.

Yet as I stand before my life, I know that the mark of maturity means to give assent to the givenness of one's life—one's experience, one's skills, one's reputation, one's pain and losses, what one has or has not achieved. To do so means having achieved what Erik Erikson refers to as *integrity*, a trait of the older adult.

I watch older adults who have achieved a tranquillity about life that exudes great strength, confidence, and peace of mind. They have discarded the agendas to act, to produce, to fill time, which society imposed on them in their early years. In old age

they have accepted their lives as they were and kept moving on from there. They have continued growing God's image in themselves.

I can't live my life again. I can't redo it. Nor did I do it alone. God graciously used all my weaknesses and strengths, all my successes and my failures. There were times when I spoke for truth with the only measure of passion I could gather. Sometimes the vision I traveled with was meager and dim, sometimes more fully focused. Sometimes I was inspired, and people wrote me to thank me for my vision.

But sometimes life moved along happenstance. I can't identify all circumstances as God's work or as miraculous answers to prayer. But I can say that my journey thus far has been an earnest attempt to live with and for God. And that will also be enough for this border crossing.

Society urges even older adults to adhere to a certain mold—to consume heavily even if they can't produce as much, to withdraw gently and silently to the periphery with their hoard of the world's goods, and generally to match the image of "old" as depicted in the media.

Yet what I as an older adult need is a continuing vision of God and God's kingdom and the realization that change can take place year by year—but only if I accept that it can take place. Otherwise, I yield to society's image of the older person as someone who changes only in the opposite direction, becoming more neurotic, contentious, and dissatisfied with the years. That also is change.

My life is my responsibility—not my parents', children's, friends', or society's. But with this transition I have another chance to escape bondage to past agendas, some culturally imposed, and to accept a better understanding of who I am may still become as an elder. When we move through a transition to a new role, even when we are older, we have an opportunity to find out how we can become more like God, or, in simpler terms, how we can become more holy or righteous. Old age is real living.

We all cheer for favorite teams. But it is also important to cheer for ourselves as we move through life. Every time we get the ball and head for the basket, we need to cheer our own action. It means praising God for ourselves. As I think through my border crossing, I see myself more and more in training as a cheerleader, not only for older adults, a group whose cheering squad has too few members, but also for myself. And I wonder if this age group has the secret urge to ride bareback in the night, on the shore, naked, unencumbered by the stigma of ageism that church and society have placed upon us.

—Katie Funk Wiebe, Wichita, Kansas, is a writer, storyteller, and speaker with a keen interest in her own aging and in becoming a cheerleader for the older adult. She has written or edited some 20 books, including *The Storekeeper's Daughter*. This article is from the second edition of *Border Crossing: A Spiritual Journey* (forthcoming in 2003 from *Dreamseeker Books*).

Reflections on Walking the Labyrinth

Elizabeth Raid

“Not number 358 again!” I sighed, as the pastor of the small church where I served as minister of music requested that the choir sing “I Come to the Garden Alone.”

“That hymn is too syrupy and ‘schmulsy,’” (as I heard it described when growing up) I wanted to say. Four-part German chorales were the sustenance of my hymn singing experience. “And he walks with me, and he talks with me, and he tells me I am his own.” What did I find so offensive about those words? The image of Jesus strolling beside me in a garden, perhaps even holding my hand, did not match the God I knew as mighty Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer.

That God got things done, made the crooked straight, the rough places plain. This gentle God could be seen in the carrying of the lamb and leading of those with young, but even that God didn’t drip with emotion or look one in the eye like the God who walked hand in hand with me in the garden might want to do.

The only redeeming image in the garden song was that of walking. I’m an avid walker, and walking has a

positive, healthy spin. Besides being good exercise, walking is my prayer time; my Scripture memory time; my hop, skipping, happy time; my slow and reflective time; or a visiting-with-friends time. Pondering the walking image drew me to a spiritual practice that involves walking—the labyrinth.

On a handout I wrote for a recent labyrinth walk, I quoted four-year-old Asa, “If you want to know God better, take a walk with God.” Labyrinths were not standard fare for good Mennonite girls growing up in the middle of the twentieth century. Anything that might resemble a Catholic icon or ritual drew ridicule, just like the gospel garden song at the other end of the theological spectrum did.

It was during my midlife journey to seminary two years ago that I discovered the labyrinth. As an ancient shape with universal and timeless appeal, the labyrinth offers me a new way to experience the metaphor of a journey—walking and talking with God. When I walk its unicursal path into the center and back out again, all of my senses seem to open to God. Because of its one-way path, my brain and busy thinking functions can coast, and my intuition and inner self can begin to emerge. As I follow its narrow way in perfect pattern, I am reminded of God’s order and plan for my life and for the world.

Because I love to be out-of-doors, I favor walking labyrinths in natural

settings. Breathtaking and mysterious things can happen, such as the sudden wind that brushed the tall pines while I sat in the center of a labyrinth in someone’s backyard in Colorado. The bird songs or the fragrances of spring can awake new awareness as I walk outdoors. The hardness of the stone path can remind me of times I am

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hard-hearted or it may reassure me of God’s steadfastness. The softness of soil or grass on my bare feet sensitizes my body, allowing God’s presence to flow up through me at the same time as I feel connected to the clay of creation and all living things.

When walking inside, quiet, repetitive music can tune my

breath to the rhythm of God’s heart, or votive candles placed around the outside points can remind me of the light of Christ within each of us. The confined space mirrors God’s nearness. I wonder if we could be walking hand in hand or step by step.

The freedom and unhurriedness of my walk reminds me of the timelessness of God. The labyrinth, like God, invites me to a place of tranquility and stability, a groundedness in the face of the chaos and change that surround my daily life. The labyrinth stands in contrast to the everyday maze of life that confuses and offers countless choices. In the rosetta at the center I can sit and wait, simply be.

I enjoy walking the labyrinth in solitude and in the company of others. There is no right or wrong way to walk it. Sometimes walking the labyrinth becomes a silent prayer in which I thank God for blessing my life. Others times I sing or cry during part of the journey. There are times when I ask a question or repeat a petition, release a past hurt or pray for another person as I walk. My steps can be slow and steady, or quick and dancelike. There are times when all of these happen during one walk.

Walking the labyrinth blends my need to grow spiritually as an individual with my need to interact in community with other travelers. Such walking presents me with the visual and tactile experience of the journey into the center of my being and then out into the world. It offers an opening to healing and hope for my broken life and world. It invites me to be renewed and reenergized.

“And he walks with me, and he talks with me, and he tells me I am his own.” I think of Elijah’s walk with God or the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Yes, I can embrace the words of the garden hymn after all. Being in the company of a human God doesn’t have to water down my theology. If God can walk and talk, even laugh and cry, as God’s creation, I too can feel deeply and experience life more fully.

Sophia, who was with the Creator at the beginning, gives me wisdom to experience God’s presence in many and varied ways. By whatever name I call God, the Divine is both transcendent and imminent. God goes before

me, is above, below, and beyond me. God is with me. Like four-year-old Asa, as I learn to walk with and know God better, I can invite others to join the journey, to walk the labyrinth of life hand in hand with a real, live everyday mysterious God.

Facts about the labyrinth:

- Earliest documentation from 1300 B.C.
- The most famous is in Chartres Cathedral in France and dates from 1194 A.D.
- Different shapes can be labyrinths; the two most common are the eleven-circuit symmetrical Chartres type; the other is the Cretin or classical with three, seven, or more circuits.
- Labyrinths are found in nearly every state in the United States and around the world.
- The oldest one in the United States is a Hopi symbol of birth and creation found in northern Arizona.
- The Reverend Lauren Artress of Grace Cathedral in San Francisco pioneered in the resurgence of the labyrinth during the 1980s.

—*Elizabeth Raid recently completed seminary studies at Earlham School of Religion in partnership with Bethany Theological Seminary, Richmond, Indiana. Classes in feminine spirituality and discernment of call and gifts, along with friends, fed her interest in labyrinths. She has walked labyrinths in seven states and looks forward to building one to share with others.*

The Low-Down on Small Talk

Valerie Weaver-Zercher

I used to hate small talk. I’d dread those times between church and Sunday school or during reunions when you shake hands with people and ask them about their asparagus patch or roof repair or the game last night. Any time that I found myself in a crowd where I heard, “How ‘bout them Steelers?” or “Whad-dya you think of that storm last night?” or even “How’s your sister-in-law’s cousin’s health?” I’d slink away as fast as I could—or if there wasn’t an easy exit, cower in the corner or hang tight to a good friend if I was lucky enough to have one nearby.

I think it was a combination of shyness and disdain for surface interactions that produced this intense antagonism. I’m not an extrovert and have always preferred old, close friendships to new, budding ones. Plus, in college my friends and I were into deep, meaningful, intimate talk. What good was talking if we weren’t analyzing the twisting contours of someone’s romance, figuring out why God allows suffering, or sharing our five-year future plans?

Sure, we laughed a lot and talked about goofy things—but certainly never about the weather or sports or canning. Even our humor was enlightened, ele-

vated by sarcasm and irony. In fact, we'd make fun of letters from our mothers and grandmothers if they included news of how much tomato juice they put up that week or who in their congregation had appendicitis. We were studying magic realism and situational ethics, daggone it; who had time for quart jars and Sister Vera's thyroid?

Looking back, I still appreciate that young-adult impulse for intimacy and openness, for deep conversations or none at all. We were coming to terms with our faiths, our vocations, our childhoods, our intellects, and our sexualities, and I'm grateful for the friendships in which we processed these. I still value those friends with whom I can share deeply about intimate, personal subjects.

In fact, I wish I had more of those conversations now, that more of my interactions included cathartic cries and gut-wrenching honesty. And I still believe that small talk can be a convenient vehicle for avoiding painful subjects, that it can be used to create distance when a conversation is getting too prickly close to what really matters.

But I'm becoming sort of a fan of small talk. Perhaps it's because most of my days are spent talking to a one-year-old. When the bulk of one's daily talk includes "What does a cow say?" and "Do you have a poopie in your diaper?" even some chit-chat with a neighbor about impatiens or the local

chocolate workers' strike seems like soul-baring conversation.

Perhaps I'm becoming what I disdained in college—an adult preoccupied with those measly little trivialities of life rather than the Really Important Issues Everyone Ought to Care About. Perhaps my stay-at-home "mom-ness" is grinding my brain into a squishy lump of hamburger, useless for shaping sentences about anything more than weather and babies.

Yet I think my new affinity for small talk also comes from realizing its usefulness, not only for avoiding those awkward silences with someone I've just just met, but also for staking out those regions of common ground with folks who, for whatever reason, I'm unlikely to become as close to as my college friends.

And since it's unlikely that I'm going to launch into conversations on the psychological impact of being a missionary kid or the hegemony of consumer culture with my neighbors or the woman at the checkout counter, I'm grateful for gardening and traffic and grandchildren and trash pick-up.

Sometimes we scratch through the surface to those things that really "matter"—this happened often during the days after September 11, when as strangers we shared parts of ourselves we usually keep well-cloaked. But I'm not sure that I even like these

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categories anymore: things that somehow "matter" and things that somehow don't.

In fact, one person's small talk can be another's life work. For my brother-in-law who is a farmer, for example, the weather isn't just a polite conversation topic; it's the force that shapes his days and determines his yield. And who says talking about peas and compost and zinnias isn't actually talking about God? Or that listening to my neighbors talk with shining eyes about their grandchildren isn't actually listening to their very souls?

I recently met up with some women who are members of my childhood congregation. I have such good memories of these caring people, but over the years it became clear my family had differing perspectives from most in the congregation about some important matters—women in leadership, for example.

As I entered my senior year of high school, I began to feel acutely the growing distance between my youth group friends and myself. I was headed to a Mennonite college away from home; most of them were going to state universities or trade schools and staying in the county. I was beginning to consider myself a feminist; most of them were hoping to get married soon and be stay-at-home moms (I won't even get into *that* irony).

Even as we threw ourselves into those adolescent hilarities of stealing friends' mattresses, soaping cars, and yelling along with Debbie Gibson songs, we began to talk about things

like politics, poverty, and theology. We began tentative arguments that usually dropped into awkward silence. Even while I began longing for the more meaningful and—dare I risk the arrogance—"intellectual" conversations I would find with my college friends, in those last few months of high school I began missing those innocent days of teenage small talk: boys, clothes, cars. Rather than figure out a way to talk about this with my friends, I began to distance myself from them with feverish extracurriculars—such as newspaper, orchestra, dramas—that placed me around college-bound kids like myself. I didn't know if my friends had changed or if I had. I still don't.

But as I began saying, I met up with some of their mothers a couple months ago. As we hugged and exchanged greetings, I began feeling sheepish and sad about the gulf that had grown up between their children and me, wishing it could have somehow been otherwise.

Even while I knew I had needed to form my own identity during those years, I wondered whether the high-school me had come across as haughty, impatient, ready to break out of Lancaster County and never look back. I wondered what these mothers thought of me, whether they thought I'd dropped their sons' and daughters' friendships without a second thought.

That evening, I couldn't bring myself to speak of the memories of my own and my family's leavings, and I'm not sure what good it would have done. *Apologize* isn't quite the right

word for what I felt I needed to do. *Acknowledged* is, perhaps—acknowledge the differences that had cropped up between us, the ensuing hurts, the remaining commonalities. But for whatever reason—shyness? lack of courage? lack of energy?—I couldn't even bring myself to do that.

What I did find, however, was that I was almost ravenous for information about the children of these friends from whom I'd grown so distant. How many children did they have? What were their names? Did they live nearby? Did they still go to our childhood church? Before long I was carried into a delightful stream of small talk with these women from my childhood, laughing about old jokes and the new antics of their grandchildren. They asked about my son and shared some of their memories from early parenthood.

That night, small talk became my savior. I probably shouldn't speak for the other women, but I think we were using this chatter about daily life as a code to communicate something

deeper to each other: *I care about you, we have things in common, we share such good memories even though we are distant.*

I'm willing to entertain the idea that I used chit-chat as a tool of avoidance that evening. Maybe I should have broached those more painful topics rather than sticking with the safe ones of memory and family. I want to remain critical of the ways small talk can function to mask what should be unmasked, to drown out what should be spoken.

But the subtexts of small talk—care for the other, commonalities among those who are different, familiarity with the stranger—can also turn chit-chat into holy chatter. I mean, who's to say heaven's conversations won't turn frequently to asparagus patches and thunderstorms?

—*Valerie Weaver-Zercher, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, is the mother of a toddler as well as assistant editor and columnist for DreamSeeker Magazine.*



With the Wissahickon, Again

The way this sand triumphs in a stream swift from September rains . . .
giving little resistance to the greater force,
always moving away from where it came,
becoming smaller and resisting less, always less.

In the company of neighbors, or relatives,
sand rests, and listens to little
explosions of falling water.

The way these trees grow free while never seeing another place . . .
welcoming storms perhaps,
when parting with limbs or leaves
is done with such ease.

Or welcoming the coming of winter, perhaps,
when even then they still grow,
still. And inside, deep within, a tree
hums, planning his gardens for the spring.

—*Jeremy Frey has published in The Mennonot, Gospel Herald, Common Ground, and Siren's Silence. Currently he lives in a sort of insulated shack on a horse farm in the Shenandoah Valley, Virginia, and is applying to MFA programs focusing on poetry.*

“They Won’t Let Me Cry”

Becoming a Caring Congregation

Hubert Schwartzenruber

During a discussion period after I spoke with a group about my understanding of the church being a very special gift from God to a broken and fragmented world, conversation took place over the perceived inability to curb the wrong directions our society is heading.

Someone asked, “What do you think the world will look like 20 years from now?”

My simple, hopefully not simplistic, answer was, “What the world will look like in 20 years from now will depend on what the church looks like 20 years from now.”

Is there enough salt left to preserve the world? Where will the light come from to enable people to read the road signs and make the right turns at the intersections of life?

I value my teachers who taught me about theology and the church. One of those teachers was an eight-year-old girl. While I was camp pastor, the little girl was referred to me by her counselor. The girl had never been away from home before. She was homesick and wanted her mother.

The counselor came to me and said, “We can’t stop her from crying; would you talk to her?”

I agreed. So Jane and I sat on a log under the shade of a big maple tree. She had a lot of pain inside her. She was away from her mother for the first time. The surroundings were all new to her. The woods and country were very different from the city that had been home all her eight years. Her old friends were not close by. The sun did not seem to shine through the heavily wooded forest. Jane was afraid and needed to cry.

As we sat on the log she began to sob and said, “They won’t let me cry.” Streams of tears were watering the log we sat on. “I just want to cry and they won’t let me cry,” she said again. “Nobody listens when I cry.”

I assured her that it was okay to cry and I would stay right with her while she cried. I also tried to assure her that we loved her very much and that her mother loved her even more.

After the reservoir of tears began to dry up and the pace of the sobs slowed, I saw a little smile break through. With her blue eyes still moist with tears, but with a new twinkle, she looked into my eyes and said, “Is it okay for me to hug you now?”

Of course it was okay! I assured her I would be available whenever she needed to cry. Jane skipped off to play games with the other children. I remained under the maple tree for

awhile. I reflected on the little counseling session. Not what I taught Jane but what Jane taught me. Two statements Jane made kept making a deep impression in my mind. One was, “They won’t let me cry”; the other was, “Is it okay for me to hug you now?”

Jane taught me something about the church my professors had not been able to get me to understand. She taught me that the church is there to listen and be with people when they need to cry. And after the crying is over, the church must receive the hugs that come from wounded people.

So often we think that our mission is to stop people from crying. And when the crying is over, we are afraid to get close enough to receive

their hugs.

I was invited one time to a banquet attended by about sixty developmentally disabled persons and volunteers who befriended them. The tone of the banquet was set by the hugs they gave each other. I have rarely witnessed the friendliness I saw there. Their laughter was from their heart. No one was a stranger. Their unpretentious nature was expressed in their “thank you” speeches. Their prayers were simple but profound. The songs they sang had depth of meaning even though they were not always on key.

As I entered into the spirit of that gathering, I became convinced that

As we sat on the log she began to sob and said, “They won’t let me cry.” Streams of tears were watering the log we sat on. “I just want to cry and they won’t let me cry,” she said again.

here surely must be the place where God's image was reflected in its purest form.

I have also attended meetings of theologians and church bureaucrats. Sometimes those meetings became gymnastic exercises to prove who held a right theology and who was in error. Instead of gentle pats on the back, the shoe on the lower part of the anatomy might be more descriptive. Meetings where bureaucrats and theologians gather sometimes become more like football games. The plays have been well rehearsed. The players are well prepared and the goal is not to come away a loser. If you have to inflict pain on another to win, that is a small price to pay for the trophy.

For theologians to help shape the good news and keep it good, they too need to learn to give hugs, say "Thank you," reach out for friendship, sing off-key, laugh at themselves.

Defining Christ's church must be done hand in hand with those who are developmentally disabled and those who are trained theologians. The wounded and the healers together need to share in the discernment task. The affluent and the poor must have an equal voice. The educated and the uneducated must sit side by side. The lawyer and the farmer and the trash collector need to be in the circle. The voice and the wisdom of both the heart surgeon and the sewer cleaner need to be heard. The preachers and

the janitors' wisdom must equally be accepted. Theology must be discerned and agreed upon on a level playing field where every voice is important and heard from.

It is in the church that all people are our brothers and sisters—who hug each other after they let each other cry. No one is better or worse than another. An ancient rabbi once asked his pupils how they could tell when night had ended and the day was on the way back.

"Could it be," asked one student, "when you can see an animal in the distance and tell whether it is a dog or a sheep?"

"No," answered the rabbi.

"Could it be" asked another, "when you can look at a tree and tell whether it is a fig or a peach tree?"

"No," said the rabbi.

"Well then when is it?" his pupils demanded.

"It is when you look on the face of any woman or man and see that she or he is your sister or brother. Because if you cannot do this, then no matter what time it is, it is still night."

—*Hubert S. Schwartzenruber, Hatfield, Pennsylvania, has been a pastor for over 40 years in a wide variety of settings, including now Souderton (Pa.) Mennonite Homes. He has also served as staff person in numerous denominational roles.*

A Jesus Shape

Randy Klassen

"A Jesus Shape." I had not read that expression before, and it intrigued me. Michael King used it in his book, *Trackless Wastes and Stars to Steer By*. Let me give the context. King writes, "Does Jesus establish his truth by engaging his disciples in complex philosophical argument? No! 'Follow me,'" Jesus says, then adds, says King, "'Each tree is known by its fruit.' Jesus asks not how well you can argue, but how well you can follow." And if you follow, you will discover that an otherworldly fruit is being developed. "It will give you a Jesus Shape."

I was arrested by those words. I believe they take us to the heart of what it means to be a Christian. We follow Jesus and his body becomes visible. We take on a Jesus shape.

While in seminary, however, I felt I needed to master systematic theology and apologetics. I was eager to be an effective evangelist, so I believed these would be the tools I would need to convince anyone of the truth of the gospel. In retrospect, I must confess that in over 35 years in the ministry, I convinced very few by skillful argument.

Those who came to faith in Jesus were usually those whose lives were touched by the kindness of someone in the church. My part was often as untheo-

logical as sharing a lunch with a fellow Chamber of Commerce member, helping a stranded motorist, assisting in the move of a professor acquaintance, or finding more customers for a good mechanic friend.

One of our missionaries told of an Islamic cleric who took the bold step of becoming a Christian because he had noticed that our World Relief supplies were not given only to Christians but to any in need regardless of their religious affiliation.

Something more compelling than doctrinal correctness was happening in these cases.

While I was recovering from heart surgery last spring, my wife brought me some good reading material, including Johannes Jorgenson's *Saint-Francis of Assisi*. I did know several things about him but had never read a full biography. Since he was Roman Catholic, I, a Protestant, would have some suspicion about "his theology." But for now I would focus on his life.

As I read his story, the Jesus shape appeared. Jorgenson describes Francis' life as "a song of praise of the risen Christ." What a beautiful commendation!

It didn't begin that way. As a rich young rebel, Francis especially hated lepers. Then came his conversion. Soon after, when riding his horse, he came upon a leper and immediately pulled the reins to go in the opposite direction. Then he remembered what he sensed the Lord had said to him:

"What you once hated will become a source of joy for you." He sprang from his horse, gave generous alms, and kissed the hands of the surprised leper. That was the first of many encounters Francis would have with lepers, including a few years later, establishing a place of care for those plagued with leprosy.

Francis believed his calling was to be an evangelist. How differently did he portray that calling than some called evangelists on TV in America today! Francis once described the role of an evangelist in these words. "What else are the servants of God than his singers, whose duty it is to light up the hearts

of all people moving them to spiritual joy." He gave his fellow missionary-evangelists this threefold prescription:

1. Don't argue or dispute with those to whom you have come. But be subject to them in love. This will show them how a Christian behaves.

2. When it pleases the Lord, you will sense the right time to share the good news from God's Word and invite a commitment to the Triune God.

3. Rejoice always! "Let those who belong to the devil hang their heads—we have every reason to be glad and rejoice in the Lord." Then he added, "This joy arises from purity of heart and perseverance in prayer."

We saw in Mother Teresa's ministry the same principles lived out.

Jesus asks us not how well we may argue, but how faithfully do we follow. Close following will produce the Jesus shape, the tangible expression of selfless, limitless, unbounded love.

Once when I illustrated a sermon with reference to her Christ-like actions toward the poor and dying on the streets of Calcutta, India, a couple decided to leave our church. Didn't I realize how wrong her theology was? "She believes in salvation by good works!"—or so they charged. This couple was so committed to a "correct" theology, they missed seeing the beauty of the Jesus shape in her life of service.

Sound biblical theology remains important for me, but it has moved back a notch or two in my life's priorities. As the apostle Paul once said, "We know in part." How could we know more when we consider the marvelous mystery of who God is! I agree with Saint Francis who asserted, "A man has as much knowledge as he executes," and "the ultimate measure of wisdom is service."

Francis lived his faith. To those in his brotherhood he said, "Whoever comes to you, friend or enemy, shall be kindly received." When a band of robbers came demanding food, Francis met them with these words, "Brother robbers! Come here! We are your brothers and we will bring you good wine and bread." Then he served them, again taking a Jesus shape.

If the judgment passages in the Bible tell us anything about what God

cares about, they are unanimous in exposing our actions. Dr. Klyne Snodgrass, professor of New Testament at North Park Theological Seminary, points out that every scriptural reference to judgment has to do with our works, our deeds, or lack of deeds of love. Not once is a test in theology required.

In closing, I'd like to take the liberty to offer this paraphrase of Paul's opening statement to the Corinthians in the thirteenth chapter: "If I speak with the eloquence of the profoundest theologian or am a master of apologetics, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal."

Jesus asks us not how well we may argue, but how faithfully do we follow. Close following will produce the Jesus shape, the tangible expression of selfless, limitless, unbounded love.

I hope that I, our church leaders, and Christ's whole church increasingly take on the Jesus shape.

—Randy Klassen, *San Andreas, California, served as pastor in Covenant Church congregations for 34 year and developed two new churches. For four years he was Covenant Church Executive Secretary of Evangelism, and he did art work professionally for six years. He has written many books and articles, most recently What Does The Bible Really Say About Hell? (Pandora Press U.S., 2001).*



What Is Real?

Dave Greiser

The phrase *What is reality?* was the dope-addled, anarchic cry of the 1970s comedy troupe “Firesign Theatre.” Those of you who don’t remember them probably got better grades in college than I did.

Reality, someone has said, ain’t what it used to be. How do we know what is real? Film itself invites the question, since in the very act of watching a movie we suspend our involvement in the real world for two hours or so. We temporarily leave the “real world” and enter the “reel world.”

In a postmodern context, reality itself is up for grabs. The so-called subject-object distinction in which reason and innate common sense help us to determine what is objectively “real” has been discredited, first by modern philosophy and now even more by postmodern thinking.

Once movies let you know clearly when their subject matter was “real” and when fantasy. “The Wizard of Oz” contained a predictable opening in the real world, followed by a clear transition to a dreamworld (signaled by a shift from black and white to color and a montage of wavy dreamlike images), and concluded with a firm return to the real, black-and-white world.

Today film makers relish blurring the distinctions between reality and imagination. They have been exploring the intellectual quandary of what is truly real

(and whether it truly matters) for several decades. Several films can be used as markers of this shift of perspective.

“The Purple Rose of Cairo,” Woody Allen’s 1986 romantic comedy about every film lover’s wish (“What would happen if the leading man became real?”) was one of the first and most pleasant films to approach our subject. Mia Farrow plays a brow-beaten wife who escapes to the movies to forget her pain. As she sits in the theater, the main character in a film literally leaves the film to pursue her, leading her to utter the great line, “I’m in love with a wonderful man. He’s smart, funny, charming, intelligent—of course he’s fictional, but you can’t have everything.” As is typical of Woody Allen, “Purple Rose” explores its serious themes with a joke.

Later films explore the question in more serious tones. One of the most popular of these in recent years is M. Night Shayamalan’s “The Sixth Sense.” Through the use of careful editing the viewer does not realize until the end of the film that nearly the entire story is a near—or after—death experience. (Careful viewers of the film will pick up clues to this effect on subsequent viewings, which may have been part of the point.)

In an earlier column I made reference to the “The Matrix” (1999), in which the main character finds out half way through the film that his entire life up to that point has been a dream induced by evil beings. A sequel to this popular cyber adventure is due out late this year, and advance web notices promise that this theme will be developed more fully.

A darker but more psychologically powerful exercise in reality-bending is

David Fincher’s flawed but intriguing “Fight Club” (1999). The main character, played by Ed Norton (called simply “The Narrator,” for reasons that become clear as the plot unfolds) discovers that a mysterious stranger (Brad Pitt) who introduces him to the brutal world of young men beating each other to pulps is actually the shadow side of his own personality.

One more kind of film explores the imagination-reality nexus—this is film which does not resolve the matter at all. “Mulholland Drive” (2001), directed by David Lynch, is a good recent example. Here there are two characters named Rita and Betty, but by the end of the film we aren’t sure if they are two people or one. There are several plot lines developed in the film, yet by the end we do not know if any of them has actually “happened.” Each story works in and of itself, but together they do not add up to a coherent story, nor are they supposed to. Yet the whole film is so mesmerizing it is hard to stop watching. One writer, reacting to the dreamlike quality of “Mulholland Drive,” said, “This is a movie to surrender yourself to. If you require logic, see something else.”

That could well be a motto for a great deal of contemporary cinema. In a world in which reality itself is increasingly mysterious, the makers of films serve as philosophers leading the way. And while I continue to watch and appreciate what they produce, I keep my old copy of “The Wizard of Oz” by the VCR—just for sanity’s sake.

—*Dave Greiser’s real world—he thinks—is Souderton, Pennsylvania, where he is pastor of Souderton Mennonite Church.*

An Account Full of Ironies

Daniel Hertzler

The Earth Is the Lord's: A Narrative History of the Lancaster Mennonite Conference, by John L. Ruth.
Herald Press, 2001, 1390 pp., \$59.99

How do you cherish and pass on to your children a radical heritage? Do you cling to it and try to keep the world at bay? Or do you live openly and cooperate with the neighbors? And what happens if you become well-to-do? John Ruth's history of Lancaster Mennonite Conference begins to offer answers. Ruth has gathered up an extensive list of heroes and successes along with some apparent renegades as well as some failures.

In his 22-line review of this book in *The Mennonite* (March 19 2002,) Gordon Houser observes that the book reads like a family history and that it "leaves outsiders, such as I, feeling like, well, outsiders." Yet he grants that "Even so, there is much to learn in this important book." It is easy to see how Gordon, a first-generation Mennonite living in Kansas, might feel that way. Yet if he were to dig a little deeper, he would discover that the influence of Lancaster Mennonite Conference has extended even to Kansas. For exam-

ple, as this book shows, Tillman Erb, who emerged as a leader in the South Central Conference, came straight from Lancaster.

For myself, I have never been able to ignore Lancaster Conference. I grew up nearby, and I later found that my mother's Shenk and Brenneman ancestors had come through Lancaster even though she herself came to Pennsylvania by way of western Ohio and eastern Virginia. Also I discovered that Allegheny Conference where I am now a member was organized by bishops from Lancaster. And when I worked for Mennonite Publishing House, one of our biggest customers was Lancaster Conference.

As Ruth shows, the term *conference* came to have a dual meaning. It was "the name for both the network of Mennonite congregations centered in the county and the twice yearly meeting for counsel, discernment, and decision by their ordained leaders" (601). Although these meetings became institutionalized on a twice yearly basis in the nineteenth century, a meeting for "housekeeping council" was held as early as 1742 (319).

According to the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, such regular gatherings first appear among Mennonites in Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. "The original intent of the word was apparently to indicate the purpose to 'confer' or counsel

about matters of common concern . . . particularly matters of faith and life" (Vol. 1, 669). As used among Mennonites today, the term *conference* carries a dual meaning, with the identity of a given network of congregations probably the more general use. Yet discernment has become a regular issue when there is disagreement among the network over issues of faith and life.

How do you cherish and pass on a radical heritage? Do you try to keep the world at bay? Or do you cooperate with the neighbors? What if you become well-to-do? John Ruth's history of Lancaster Mennonite Conference begins to offer answers.

In the Conestoga Amish Mennonite community near Morgantown, Pennsylvania, we were well aware of Lancaster Mennonites. We invited their preachers to speak in our churches and members of our youth group sometimes helped with service projects in the conference. We found much in Lancaster to identify with, although one issue particularly troubled us.

Numbers of Lancaster Mennonites farmed tobacco—on that good land!

As Ruth observes, growing tobacco was one issue Lancaster Mennonites were not able decisively to deal with. The conference made pronouncements on clothing and other cultural matters such as attendance at movies. But they were not able to produce a clear definitive statement against growing tobacco. Evidently there was too much money at stake.

This was ironic, as Ruth would imply. Indeed the title he has chosen suggests irony, as the history will demonstrate. After nearly two cen-

turies of persistent—and earlier deadly—persecution in Switzerland, the Lancaster Mennonites finally landed on some of the best land in the Americas.

Ruth takes space to describe the Swiss experience. Even though the last Anabaptist martyr—Hans Landis—was killed in 1614, repression continued. Swiss Reformed pastors led the charge. As Ruth describes it, they could not tolerate people who would not attend their churches, who baptized adults instead of babies, celebrated the Lord's Supper on their own, and would not serve in the Swiss Army. Such stubbornness was more than they could tolerate, and they had the Swiss government on their side.

After the Thirty Years War, which ended in 1648, numbers of Swiss Anabaptists were allowed to move to Germany, where they helped to rebuild that devastated country. But the area open to them soon filled up.

Finally, in the early 1700s the way opened for them to migrate to Pennsylvania. Some settled north of Philadelphia and would form Franconia Conference. Others pushed on westward to the banks of the Pequea Creek. They paid for their land, but if they had wanted to know they could have learned that Native Americans had only recently been pushed off this land. Some of these Mennonites soon became prosperous.

As irony would have it, they seem to have found it more difficult to maintain their tradition of severe faithfulness in the open society of Pennsylvania than under repression in Switzerland. Centrifugal forces

have been at work throughout their North American history. Two influences have been particularly attractive to the children of these sober Swiss Anabaptists: the lure of the civic and economic systems and the lure of more exciting religious experiences. As the book documents repeatedly, those who left for either reason seemed soon to forget the urgency of following the more radical teachings of Jesus.

Yet the tradition has persisted. Some stayed with it and others were invited in. I found as I perused this tome that I repeatedly got lost in the succession of bishops, Herrs and Ebys, Brubachers and Landises, but I kept coming back to the stories of those who rose to the challenge of discipleship.

This is a warts-and-all history. An analogy for this historian might be a surveillance camera. He surveys the landscape in all directions and takes note of anything that moves—at least if it impinges on the story. The question of faithfulness is always before him: what from the past must be preserved and what may be adjusted? There is never a completely unified perspective. After surviving the troubles and schisms of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Lancaster Conference faced new challenges in the twentieth. Particularly troublesome were outside religious and educational forces.

Two contrasting impulses were expressed in the Lancaster Conference of the twentieth century. One was the urge to draw more boldly the cultural separation from society. The other

was to practice more vigorously the commission at the end of Matthew to “make disciples.” At the end Ruth shows that the former ultimately failed, although major divisions represented convictions of persons determined to practice cultural nonconformity. But the main group could no longer consistently prescribe veils and long hair for women and collarless coats for men—even for bishops.

“There was special pathos,” Ruth writes, in the final days of Bishop J. Paul Graybill, whose vision included both separation and evangelism. “In a weakened condition he grieved over a sense of missing his goal of leading a once unified group of plain people to new dedication. . . . Yet there were those with appreciative words for his sincerity and his passionate dream for a culturally separated church” (1117).

The second impulse succeeded beyond their wildest dreams, although more dramatically overseas than in the local communities. At the end of the century, both Tanzania and Ethiopia had more members in churches planted by Lancaster than did the home conference.

In the book's epilogue, irony prevails. Mennonites who had cherished the land for close to three centuries no longer had the same urge. Many were selling to developers or to Amish who still wanted to farm it. As Ruth observes, “On land matters, the enthusiastic new independent churches had nothing to say, and those Mennonites

who did speak generally muted their voices. It was much easier to dwell on ‘the plan of salvation’ or charismatic ecstasy and let the disposition of the earth to those who speculated on its monetary value” (1125, 1126).

Yet Ruth would remain hopeful, and he closes the last full chapter with the words of “devout truck and chicken farmer” Bishop H. Raymond Charles, who attended Mennonite World Conference at Wichita, Kansas, in 1978 and was impressed to see who was there. “The realization dawned on Raymond that the tiny flock of Lancaster Mennonite had spread until they had representatives in about a fourth of the 225 countries of the world. . . .

“‘This is the nearest to heaven I’ve ever been,’ Raymond remarked to Paul Kraybill. . . . And the end, Raymond would reflect, was ‘not yet.’ Even if his people would enter no more fields, the network of Christian faith already established was going to ‘spread, spread, spread’” (1118).

—*Daniel Hertzler, Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, and his wife Mary live on a 3.6 acre farm in Westmoreland County where they cultivate the earth. Mary specializes in flowers and he in vegetables. In a typical Appalachian spring they fight frost with blankets and/or sprinkling with water before the sun is up. This year was especially bad and Mary predicts the day lilies will not bloom at all.*



Woman Distracted by Work on the Job

Noël R. King

Nicole Beraina, of Reston, Virginia, recently sued her employer, DataNet, for infringing on her outside activities while she was on the job as Marketing Specialist at the company's offices in northern Virginia.

"It was really getting out of hand," Ms. Beraina stated in a signed document that was leaked to the press by knowledgeable sources. "It had gotten to the point where I was no longer able to count on getting even half of my own things done whenever I reported to work. I'd have to leave my desk at the end of the day with half my chores still left to do—scheduling car appointments, making dentist and doctor appointments, shopping online for holiday presents, sending out job queries, reading personal emails, and catching up with old friends on the phone, just to name a few."

Tom Binder, a colleague of Ms. Beraina's at DataNet, sympathized with his co-worker and questioned the wisdom of a company demanding too much work from its workers.

"I totally know what she means," he said, caught outside during a smoking break in the early afternoon last week. "It's especially tough for me since I smoke,

but if she can't get all her personal chores done even without taking smoking breaks, wow. She must really be hurting."

When spotted by a reporter earlier today, Ms. Beraina's supervisor declined comment and quickly disappeared into the convenience store next to DataNet's main building. He was seen buying Christmas cards and plumbing tools and then reading *Car & Auto* magazines for 20 minutes before returning to DataNet's main building.

In DataNet's official statement regarding the matter, the company noted that a court date has not yet been set because Ms. Beraina has not been able to find any full days in the next two months when she has not already scheduled personal appointments during work hours.

—As circumstances warrant, through her Turquoise Pen column Noël R. King, Reston, Virginia, will be reporting on travails such as Beraina's and other breaking news.

Letter

Dear Editors, Thanks so much for all of the *DreamSeeker Magazine* Spring 2002 articles related to mental illness, including to your sister's journey, Michael. I was reminded over and over of former parishoners who suffered in our midst. Many are still among us, and we in the church surely need to better understand how to appreciate their gifts and minister to their struggles.

My Quaker upbringing (my ancestral heroes) undoubtedly laid the groundwork for my deep appreciation of many of the other articles—an intellectual dialogue about hearing God's voice and what that does or does not mean, about the Easter Walk toward personal resurrection, and about the Original Word's importance in aiding us as we interpret written Scripture, helping us to value what the Bible says rather than to make it an infallible God. C. Norman Kraus is an important voice in helping to broaden the church's view of The Bible and God.

DreamSeeker Magazine is expressing the kind of freedom we need to question, stimulate thinking, and nurture spiritual growth.—*Ruth Naylor*



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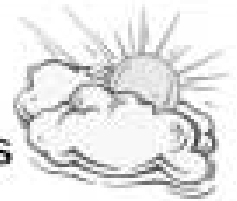
Or perhaps you already subscribe to *DreamSeeker Magazine* and are an author interested in being published in *DSM*, as a growing number of writers are. Then what? Indeed a key part of the *DSM* vision is to support the work of gifted writers—without whose inspired contributions the magazine of course could not exist. However, the limited space available in a quarterly magazine does not allow us routinely to accept unsolicited material. Thus we are not actively inviting submissions and are primarily publishing articles by our regular columnists and contributors or material we solicit. Nevertheless, we aim to treat unsolicited submissions respectfully and are happy that we *are* occasionally able to accept them, preferably by e-mail to mking@netreach.net or to the Telford address above. (Note that unsolicited articles submitted by mail without SASE are unlikely to be returned.)

Although we are not actively soliciting articles, we do very much welcome feedback, including short letters for publication and occasional longer responses to articles.

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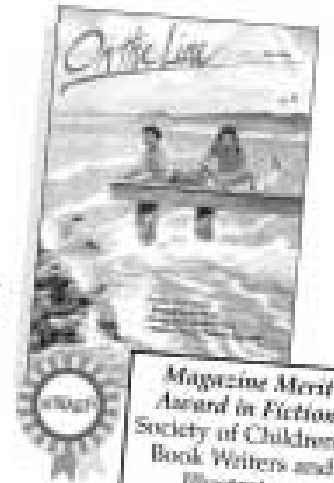
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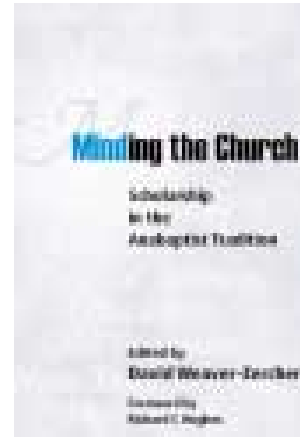
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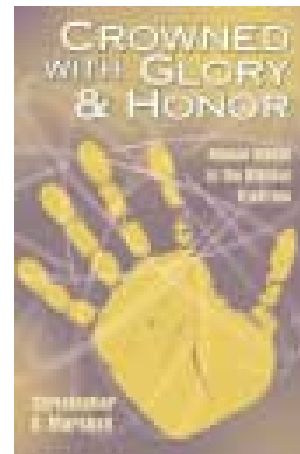


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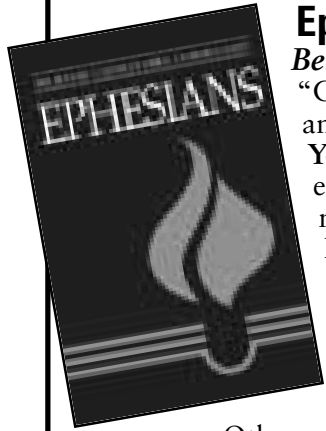
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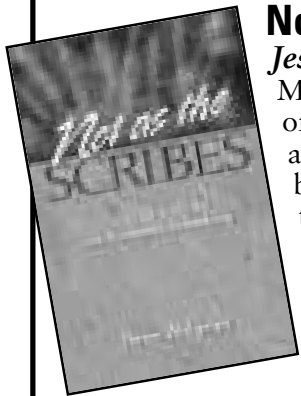
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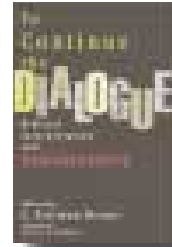
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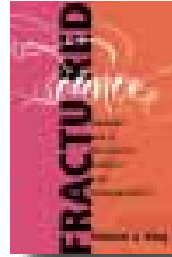
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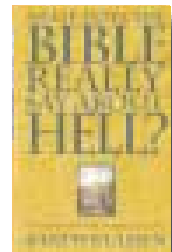
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Fractured Dance: Gadamer and a Mennonite Conflict Over Homosexuality, C. Henry Smith Series 3, Michael A. King. "I applaud King for undertaking such a task, enabling us to see why in such a conversational dance people sometimes 'kick' each other. The book is brilliant, a great treat in philosophical hermeneutics," observes Willard M. Swartley in a review essay, *Mennonite Quarterly Review*. 6 x 9; 304 p; \$22.95/33.95



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communities,
or even their
children.”

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