

# **D**reamSeeker Magazine

Voices from the Soul



## **Ink Aria**

*An American Sickness as Viewed from Vietnam*  
Renee Gehman

## **Shaken in My Sense of What Is Right**

Katelyn I. King

## **Kingsview**

*Welile and More Fly into the Nest*  
Michael A. King

## **Steppin' Up to the Line**

Polly Ann Brown

## **Why I Am a Mennonite Farmer**

William Dellinger

## **Kurt Vonnegut Among the Iconoclasts: Abraham, Erasmus, Anabaptists, and Atheists**

Kent Davis Sensenig

*and much more*

---

**Summer 2007**

Volume 7, Number 3; ISSN 1546-4172

# Editorial: The View from Outside

The view from outside. One way or another, that's what most articles in this issue of *DreamSeeker Magazine* explore. Renee Gehman starts us off with a view of America from Vietnam and the embarrassed sorrow she experiences as the Nickel Mine and Virginia Tech shootings show the world a hosts struggle to understand.

Next comes a view from Africa, as Katelyn King, plunged into the intensities, griefs, and moral ambiguities of the HIV/AIDS crisis, moves back and forth between looking at either Africa or America from the outside. Then I report on visiting her in Africa and experiencing myself as outside it yet so warmly adopted by those in it I can only in turn realize that even those so far from my normal life also belong in my family's nest.

Polly Ann Brown movingly draws on the movie "Freedom Writers" to ponder how those outside each other's lives in such settings as urban schools may learn nevertheless to know and be known. William Dellinger tells of his efforts, in word as well as in deed, through farming, to live outside an oil economy threatening to kill our planet both literally and spiritually.

Though the tone shifts dramatically (typical when Kurt Vonnegut is in view), Kent Davis Sensenig extends Dellinger's thoughts on living outside Western culture's corrosive effects. Sensenig ponders how this atheist, an outsider from a Christian vantage

point, nevertheless helped Christians stand outside the "normal" world from perspectives that resonated with the Way of Jesus.

Noël R. King helps us view matters nearly from outside reality itself, as she reports slyly and playfully on imaginary friends. Mennonites struggle to reconcile police work with pacifist beliefs; other Christians struggle to make sense of this. Truman Brunk shows how those outside either perspective might together build a new "inside."

Deborah Good temporarily views her normal, active life in Philadelphia from outside, as she spends a summer seeking and pondering quietness in West Virginia. David Greiser stands outside the standard film review canons to focus less on how "Spiderman 3" works as a movie (it doesn't always, he says) and more on what can be learned if the film is probed for its implicit, possibly even unconscious, "unmistakable mark of One who cannot, finally, be hidden."

As wars small and large continue to ravage the world, Daniel Hertzler reviews three books that view war and peace from outside the war tradition. As Hertzler concludes, "Somehow it is worth remembering that in World War II, some fought fires instead of people." And in their various ways this issue's poets take us outside ordinary perspectives to view heat, water, fatherhood, and more afresh.

—Michael A. King

**The view from outside. . . that's what most articles in this issue . . . explore.**

## Editor

Michael A. King

## Assistant Editor

Renee Gehman

## Editorial Council

David Graybill, Daniel Hertzler, Kristina M. King, Richard A. Kauffman, Paul M. Schrock

## Columnists or Regular Contributors

Renee Gehman, Deborah Good, David B. Greiser, Daniel Hertzler, Michael A. King, Noël R. King, Mark R. Wenger

## Publication, Printing, and Design

Cascadia Publishing House

## Advertising

Michael A. King

## Contact

126 Klinger Road  
Telford, PA 18969  
1-215-723-9125

[DSM@cascadiapublishinghouse.com](mailto:DSM@cascadiapublishinghouse.com)

## Submissions

Occasional unsolicited submissions accepted, 750-1500 words, returned only with SASE. Letters invited.

## Subscriptions

Standard rates in U.S.  
\$14.95/yr. in US, automatic Jan. renewals, cancel any time.  
Single copy: \$3.75

## Free online:

[www.CascadiaPublishingHouse.com/dsm](http://www.CascadiaPublishingHouse.com/dsm)

*DreamSeeker Magazine* is published quarterly in spring, summer, fall, and winter.

Copyright © 2007  
ISSN: 1546-4172 (paper)  
ISSN: 1548-1719 (online)

# IN THIS ISSUE

Summer 2007, Volume 7, Number 3

## Editorial: The View from Outside

### Poetry

Jonathan Beachy, *Drought of '81* • 2, *One Summer Day* • back cover; W. N. Richardson, *Fatherhood* • 18, *Resilience* • 45

### Ink Aria

*An American Sickness as Viewed from Vietnam*  
Renee Gehman

### Shaken in My Sense of What Is Right

Katelyn I. King

### Kingsview

*Welile and More Fly into the Nest*  
Michael A. King

### Steppin' Up to the Line

Polly Ann Brown

### Why I Am a Mennonite Farmer

William Dellinger

### Kurt Vonnegut Among the Iconoclasts: Abraham, Erasmus, Anabaptists, and Atheists

Kent Davis Sensenig

### The Turquoise Pen

*Just Between You and Me*  
Noël R. King

### A Mennonite Police Chief

Truman H. Brunk

### Beneath the Skyline

*Being Quiet*  
Deborah Good

### Reel Reflections

"*Spiderman 3*": *Grace-fully Flawed*  
Dave Greiser

### Books, Faith, World & More

*Peacemaking—The Walk and the Talk: Reviews of Smoke Jumping on the Western Fire Line, A Precarious Peace, and The Fragmentation of the Church and Its Unity in Peacemaking*  
Daniel Hertzler

3

6

12

15

19

25

30

32

34

37

40

### *Drought of '81*

Death's nauseous odor  
Sweeps along the  
Scorching wind,  
Buzzards fat, ugly  
Eyes bulging like the  
Bloated bovine carcasses  
Littering shriveled fields  
Frozen citrus leaves  
Rattle a death chant  
Daring any would be  
Spring growth to reconsider  
Wood-fired pots  
Boil brackish water to stew  
Yesterday's bones one more time  
Beans brittle and broken  
Pierced by beetles  
Useless for seed in famished soil  
Barely cover the bottom of  
A gunnysack  
But for today, beans and bones will  
Keep death at bay  
Vines without branch or wine,  
Imported spirits grant scarce  
Reprieve from children whose  
Cries become whimpers become silence  
Distant flickering lightening  
Fails to find the rheostat and  
Rain remains stored overhead  
Will today's heat  
Thin the air enough to  
Ground the eagle,  
Or will it rise. . . .  
Will yet unbroken trust  
Sustain the praises of a distant Maker,  
Or will death's odor likewise overtake us?  
". . . I will exalt the Lord,  
Who sustains my life,  
My salvation and my strength,  
Though all grow weary, though all faint,  
I'll wait for him, for him I'll wait. . . ."\*  
Or will I?

—*Jonathan Beachy*. Adapted from "Eagles' Wings" by Jim Croegaert, Copyright © 1974, Rough Stones Music, 827 Monroe St., Evanston IL 60202. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

## An American Sickness as Viewed from Vietnam

Renee Gehman

**I**n nine months, I have sought to understand many a mystery of Vietnamese culture, sometimes successfully, sometimes not. Now, in the wake of the Virginia Tech shootings, I have again been experiencing culture shock—but this time, the culture that's left me baffled is that of my own nation.

It was actually months ago I first felt it creeping up on me, when nine-year old host sister Thu Giang confided in me that she was scared to go to America because of the guns and bombs. On another occasion my host mother asked if it was true that people get shot in cities near my home.

I hesitated to respond to questions and comments like these, not wanting Vietnamese people to misperceive my home as an unsafe place, with unsafe, uncivilized people. It's never felt that way to me, especially since all I've seen guns used for at home is hunting and shooting for sport.

**T**hen came the tragedies of Nickel Mines and Virginia Tech. As Vietnamese people approached me

with their condolences, they also pressed me for an explanation of trigger-happy America. Why, they wanted to know, after so many school shootings, hasn't the government changed anything?

Again, I hesitated to respond, but now it was due to embarrassment at what I was just beginning to realize: It is *America*—not the world—that is having these problems with shootings. I was embarrassed at having presumed that because gun violence is normal in America, it must also be a global problem.

And I was embarrassed at the presumptions I had made about Vietnam, even as I have tried to live here with an open mind. Many of the cultural differences that initially shocked me about Vietnam planted in my subconscious the belief that America, the developed and advanced country, was somehow more “civilized” than this developing country.

In Vietnam, you must boil the water before you drink it, and a lack of sanitation makes it much easier to get sick from the food you eat. In Vietnam on the sidewalks I sometimes see women shampooing their hair, men relieving themselves, or mothers holding up their babies over the curb so they can go to the bathroom in the gutters. In Vietnam, the bathroom facility is often just a “squat toilet”—a hole in the ground—and no toilet paper. And in Vietnam, it's fine to pick your nose in public or to throw trash on the streets.

But how is gun culture any more civilized than a shampooing-on-the-sidewalks-and-getting-sick-from-un-sanitary-food culture? Things like the shooting at Virginia Tech just don't happen here. There just aren't gun deaths. People are not killing other

**How is gun culture any more civilized than a shampooing-on-the-sidewalks-and-getting-sick-from-unsanitary-food culture?**

people. An Internet search for gun statistics yields nothing for Vietnam, but a search for gun violence in America produces over a million results, several of which say: “Every two years as many people die from gun violence as Americans who died in the Vietnam-American War.”

In the case of Virginia Tech, several guests of America were drawn into that statistic. Parthai Lumbantarun's family had sold cars and property so that he could go to America from Indonesia to pursue his doctoral degree in civil engineering before returning home to teach.

Daniel Perez Cueva was actively involved in swimming, singing, and dancing in Peru, but he left because he wanted a degree from an American university. Juan Ortiz was a Puerto Rican grad student studying education who had barely been in the U.S. with his new wife for a year. Minal Panchal was another grad student, with hopes of becoming an architect like her father in India.

And Henh Lee, whose story hit me the hardest. His parents, of Chinese ethnicity, had emigrated from Vietnam when Henh Lee was six and none of the family knew English. Years later Henh would give a speech

in which he talked about the difficulty of sitting in a classroom and not being able to talk to anyone, about living in America with immigrant parents and how much of a struggle it was to learn the language and the culture. (This speech, which Henh gave when he graduated from high school as salutatorian with a 4.47 GPA, can be found at [www.roanoke.com/multimedia/video/wb/114450](http://www.roanoke.com/multimedia/video/wb/114450))

One way to deal with culture shock is to educate yourself on the culture, as knowledge tends to cultivate understanding. I like to think this is what helped make Henh so successful.

So I'm reading. I'm reading about the grief of the families that has spread throughout the nation. I'm reading about funeral bills that were covered, dinners cooked, and lawns mowed for families of the victims. I'm reading about a search for a solution.

I'm also reading about the violated right to defend ourselves. People are outraged that the students of Virginia Tech were forced to stand by defenseless while their classmates were shot down. To stop school shootings, we must allow guns in the schools, many people are saying.

I'm even reading about how, sometimes, guns are not only a right, but a *requirement*. In 1982, the town of Kennesaw, Georgia passed a gun ordinance making it *mandatory* that all heads of a household own a firearm. Since then, an amendment has granted exceptions to convicted felons, conscientious objectors, and those who cannot afford a gun.

The culture shock is still there.

I wonder if something like Kennesaw, Georgia, would be as surprising to the rest of the world as it is to naive me. Or perhaps this gun culture has become so much a part of America that it wouldn't surprise global citizens at all, because guns are just another one of those things that go with America. Like fast food. Like big cars. Like Christianity.

One danger I've realized in this life abroad is that in wanting to understand, we can easily convince ourselves that we do understand when in fact we do not. I've been in Vietnam almost a year now, and, aware of this danger as I am, I still have to constantly remind myself that things are not necessarily what they seem to be. That I don't necessarily “get” this culture just because I live here.

How much harder must it be, then, for us to admit some of the flaws of our own culture. How much harder must it be for America as a nation, a *superpower*, to admit that, in some ways—in some scary and shocking ways—we have a sickness in our culture that needs attention.

We turn to our government, our psychologists, and our school officials for a reason why and for a solution. What if we turned to other cultures not afflicted by our particular sickness and asked them for advice?

—*Renee Gehman*, DreamSeeker Magazine assistant editor and columnist, is completing 11 months with MCC's SALT program in Hanoi, Vietnam, as English Editor for the World Publishing House.

# Shaken in My Sense of What Is Right

Katelyn I. King

**W**hat to say, where to start? The thing I'm struck most with at the moment is how shaken I feel my sense of what is right. Actually, I'll probably get anxious just writing about it. It's kind of ironic, because I feel like I've been growing tremendously in terms of spirituality this year. You would think (at least I did), that as a result, things would become clearer, the "right path," so to speak, would be more illuminated.

Once again, my assumptions have proved false, and I am again stuck in the pit of constant questioning, constantly feeling uncertain and constantly feeling like my role here is incredibly difficult to understand. What is the right thing to do as an outsider? What is the right thing to do as a person who is working every day in the HIV/AIDS field and has enlightening information to share? What is the right thing to do as a fellow human being? What is the right thing to do as a Christian?

Are my motives selfish? Or are they selfless? (Well okay, true selflessness seems totally impossible to me, but you get the drift.) Am I making decisions based on what will let me maintain my peace of mind, or am I making decisions based on what I believe is right—

though I don't even *know* what is right anymore? These are the questions that are constantly intruding into my mind, and I find them to be the most persistent at night.

**E**ven two months ago I would have said that in terms of the AIDS situation here, my role was pretty clear: encourage people to get tested, encourage people to accept their status, and encourage people to seek the truth, because the truth shall set you free, right? And because life is precious and should be preserved, right?

Because based on my experiences, it seems like knowing my status, however grave the consequences of that knowledge may prove to be, would be worth it. Facing your fears, while initially terrifying, ultimately proves to be incredibly healing . . . at least that's what my experience has been in the past.

But then you're in the middle of the warzone, right smack in the middle of what is probably the worst disease of the present day . . . and you know people who have this disease. And you know people who are affected by this disease. And you realize that the answer isn't simple.

Why would I think it's the best thing to get tested? Because I have parents who love me and accept me no matter what. Because I belong to a church whose members would be willing to join in my pain and would be willing to walk with me through the suffering until I came out on the

other side of it. Because there are plenty of psychologists, counselors, pastors, and more whom I could go to for support. Because I have the financial resources and medical facilities to get the best care and know that I probably have those resources available to me indefinitely.

Because I have parents who have always had honesty at the center of their relationship and who have always had honesty at the center of their relationship with me, a value which is now so deeply embedded into my personality that it's very hard for me to see a perspective that does not include that as one of its foundational principles. Because I

have a certain internal disposition that interacts with all of the above mentioned factors and influences my thinking and my decisions. And the list goes on and on.

**S**o then what happens when you're here, and you start to really understand the situation and you start to develop close relationships with some of the people that are right in the thick of it all? Let me try to paint a bit of a picture.

Say there's a woman in South Africa, or one of the many other countries, in Africa and elsewhere, living her story. Say she's married and has four children. Her husband passes away, and she doesn't know why. She may suspect that he died because of AIDS. At this point in many countries on this continent her story is the

**Even two months ago I would have said that in terms of the AIDS situation here, my role was pretty clear. . . .**



story of thousands, hundreds of thousands, more. Thus it's quite likely that a widow is a widow because her husband died of AIDS.

But who can she talk to? If she even brings up the possibility that he died because of AIDS, automatically, even if it's subtle, there's an implication that her husband got AIDS because of infidelity.

Suppose he's a Christian. It's bad enough to be unfaithful to your wife, but when you belong to a church, it's even more of an abomination. Do you live in fear for the rest of your days because the risk of even talking to someone about it is too great? Do you live in fear that a very scary death may be on its way in the next few years? And that's just the first stage. Some people never get past it.

**T**hen say this woman decides that she needs to talk about it with someone or someone decides to talk about it with her. Suppose she admits that she's very scared her husband may have died because of AIDS. She knows she should probably get tested, but she's terrified to get her results.

"Why are you scared to get the results?" you may ask. Most of the time, the answer is some variation of the following: "Because I'm afraid I won't be accepted." Working with home-based care, I have heard many such stories and answers.

As a person so foreign to this culture, my early response in talking to such women, who had felt so isolated in their fear and inability to find a safe place to talk about what was on their minds for so long, I'd immediately

jump into it: "I will go with you to get tested. I will be with you when you get the results, I can connect you with people who can help, I can try to set up a support network for you. . . . Get yourself and your four children tested. You will find a way through this."

Obviously the right response, not? Looking back, I'm not saying that it was the wrong response, but I do think having a deeper understanding of how best to be a support requires a lot more careful contemplation and patient waiting amid what is often very frustrating ambiguity. I don't know if I really will ever be able to convey the complexities of the situation, but I'll attempt to give a little more of a glimpse. . . .

As I've talked to such women and continue to spend countless minutes of every day swimming in my own sometimes panicky thoughts in regard to such situations, a lot of realizations have started to emerge for me. I've been forced to ponder lessons to be found in confronting both the reality of many people's lives here and my role as a service worker (and human being, and Christian, etc. etc.) amid that reality.

Say a woman does finally start coming to terms with possibly being HIV positive. Does she decide to test? If she tests, and the results come back positive . . . she will have to tell someone, won't she?

And what if the people who she relates to most directly can't accept it? Their lives, at least initially, will literally fall apart if someone in the family tests positive. Will she be able to han-

dle that breakdown along with her own HIV-positive condition? Will she have enough internal strength, enough initiative to get outside help if need be, to take that risk? Can she hold on long enough for the worst of it to pass? And what if her loved ones just can't accept it? Will she live in isolation? Will she always have a feeling of being now on the "outside"?

But then the flip side: What if they did finally accept it? Because I've seen that story unfold too. More and more, it seems. And when the story turns into that of a woman whose family accepts her HIV-positive status, then she has the support she needs to keep functioning, to maintain a higher quality of life. And ultimately things are better after she tests positive than before she tested positive—because the healing comes when you go through the pain—because the healing, if it ever comes, comes when you go through the pain.

But until a particular woman's story turns into one that includes support after she tests HIV-positive, she faces great risk. Some families *will* reject. Is she willing to risk that? If the worst happens, can she handle it? I can't make that call for her.

Then say a woman has a child she decides to test. Say that child's test comes back positive, as I've seen happen. What then? At least some people will have to know, because the child will have to miss school for monthly

(or more than that) appointments at the clinic, where she or he will get CD4 counts checked, where medication will be refilled, and so on. If people find out, what will they think? Many will be accepting. But in some cases, the child will really struggle—with family, with friends, with teachers.

Again that great risk. If the mother decides to have her children tested, will this one be made fun of? Will that one be accepted?

**But until a particular woman's story turns into one that includes support after she tests HIV-positive, she faces great risk. Some families will reject. Is she willing to risk that?**

**T**hen there's the question of anti-retrovirals (ARVs), used to treat HIV/AIDS. Because if you know your child is going to get sick, you probably want to do everything in your power

to delay that sickness. But at what cost? Once you start taking ARVs, you have to take them for life, with the right diet, at the same time every day, three times a day. Sometimes there are side effects. Sometimes they don't work that well. Sometimes (though not very often, in my understanding), they don't work at all.

I saw a boy who had been taking ARVs for two years, and he was very sick. He always had this sadness about him. He had lost both of his parents to AIDS, so he was always shuffled between houses, never really knowing stability. Yes, the ARVs probably prolonged his life for a couple of years. But what was the quality of his life? He was always sick, kids made fun of him at school, he never really seemed to have peace.

As a mother, you have to be thinking, *What will be best for my child? Do I take the risk of having her be rejected by family, friends, society? Do I take the risk of putting her on ARVs? Maybe she's not positive. But if I test him, and he is positive, then it's my responsibility to do something about it. I have to, once I know. Maybe knowing is worse than not knowing. Maybe knowing will ruin my child's life. Maybe knowing will ruin my family's life.*

And here is the American, one-year volunteer coming into this warzone and hearing these stories and talking to these people. The immediate reaction is to be their "savior." Give them the information, take them to the facilities, tell them that LIFE CAN BE PROLONGED!

Get them tested. Yeah, it will be really, really hard if the results are positive, but it's better to know. So you go with them to get tested, the test comes back positive, then it's time for you to go home, back to America, back to safety, to support, to love and comfort and unconditional acceptance, just when the manure has hit the fan in Africa.

You encouraged and encouraged them to get the test, because that is the *only* right answer, you *must* save their lives, and your peace of mind will be ruined forever if they don't do what you know is the right thing. But now it's time for you to leave, and you've left them to pick up the pieces of a decision that was partly made because of your encouragement, your support.

But then if you *don't* encourage someone to get tested, isn't that just

prolonging the madness? Isn't that somehow morally wrong? Doesn't that go against the laws of Christianity, of love, of compassion, of *hope*, for goodness' sake? All the while, never knowing how much of what you think comes from fear, how much of what you think comes from reality/what really could happen, and how do you ever distinguish between the two?

*So what is your role!* I'm not even close to figuring out what Jesus would do in this situation (I know, how do we ever know really, but. . .) because I can't even figure out what truth is anymore.

Isn't that sad? You'd think you'd be *more* sure, but I'm not. Do we prolong life? At what cost? And for what purpose? Is it so that we can feel okay, so that we can feel like we're relevant, keep our peace of mind? Or is it because life is precious, and it's our job as fellow human beings to help others preserve it?

And again at *what cost?* How can I possibly know how the quality of life of someone living in this culture, in this way of thinking, with certain people, will be affected? And is it really my place to make that judgment call?

Then you start to realize that death is a part of life. In America, we don't really like to think about that fact. (In fact, if anyone dies before the age of 65, everyone treats it like it's a great tragedy. I'm not diminishing the sorrow of death at any age, but it's just so different over here and in other parts of the world.) In America, we value preserving life. We'll spend millions

of dollars on cancer research, on all kinds of treatment, which can often be quite painful and expensive and time-consuming for the patient—but we do it, because death should be pushed off, avoided at all costs.

Then if people in America decide they don't want a certain treatment, that the right thing for them is to accept death, half the people freak out! So it just makes me wonder: When do you fight for life? And when do you accept that we will all face death sooner or later, and for some people, sooner is the only option that they can cope with?

I am in no way saying that we should just let people die, or that we should just stop fighting disease, or throw up our hands in the air and say, "I give up." I'm just asking the question, trying to figure out how someone can offer something *healing* amid all of this.

I still think that, ultimately, getting tested, knowing one's status, seeking the truth, is the right road. But that has to be the decision of those people involved; that can't be my decision for others. At this point, I don't feel it's right for me to force my belief system and everything that comes with that on someone who has to deal with what could be a lifetime of consequences.

And after all of this, I can't help but ask myself, *Will I ever be okay again after I leave this place? Will I ever have*

*peace of mind again?* Because I just keep thinking and thinking about these people that I have come to love so deeply, and I don't know what's going to happen to them. It would be more manageable if it was just one person, but it's so many of those that I see every day.

**One of the people here I've become close to said to me, "I always ask myself, when will I see her again? . . . Will it be in this life, or will I have to wait until we get to heaven?"**

Of some, I think, *My gosh, they just don't know what they're doing, they don't understand that the way they're dealing with the situation will ultimately only bring them more pain.*

And I can see this because I'm an outsider, but I can't say anything, and I just have to watch, knowing what the future will most likely hold.

In relation to others I think, *How will I ever be able to leave you? You have given me so much, you have become such a part of me, we have shared so much together, and how can I go back to a place where you're not? What will happen to you? If death comes, will you be scared? Will you feel alone? Will you have dignity at the end? Will the people you leave behind be able to make sense of it all? Will I ever see you again?* One of the people here I've become close to said to me, "I always ask myself, when will I see her again? How long will it be? Will it be in this life, or will I have to wait until we get to heaven?"

—Katelyn I. King is serving in Africa with the Mennonite Central Committee SALT (Serving and Learning Together) Program.

## Welile and More Fly into the Nest

Michael A. King

Just as our daughters were for long stretches gone from the family nest, a whole new family flew in. The first new member was Welile. She was once our middle daughter. That version of her left in summer 2006. Inspired by the “Serving and Learning Together” vision of the Mennonite Central Committee SALT program, she had moved to Africa for a year. We hear from her every now and then, more often now as her time to return to our nest grows nearer.

But once she arrived in Africa we learned she had also become Welile, which means “one who crosses over.” We met Welile this year. When the doors to the South African Airways Airbus A-340 slated to deposit us 15 hours later in Johannesburg closed, my wife Joan and I felt shivers in our souls. We were at the beginning of a holy journey, we suspected.

We were right. Through the occasionally swinging door of the customs area in that tiny airport, we for the first time glimpsed our new daughter, Welile. That was awe-inspiring enough. Then we saw, grinning ear to ear beside her, African faces, eager to glimpse us oddities from America. They were Welile’s family. Two vehicle-loads of them had come to greet us.

Others who have experienced it will recognize what had happened: In Welile’s culture, her family was our family, and our family theirs. Our own family was driving us through this so-far-from-home mix of mango trees, the ubiquitous VW mini-buses, paved highways leading to dirt roads, people who understandably see white skin as such an oddity that one girl once asked why Welile was all covered in bandages.

So when we arrived at the homestead, a compound of four homes and interrelated families, how dizzying yet miraculous it was to greet no strangers. Just Welile’s *make* (mother) plus her and our grandparents, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, nephews, nieces, cousins, cousins of cousins, and more.

Stop the story there, and our intimations of holiness upon departure would have been correct. But two days later the circle of family grew yet larger. Welile works with a Christian organization caring for those infected by HIV/AIDS, which is devastating Africa. Friday morning we set out, with Welile plus supervisors Make Mary and Make Shongwe, on visits.

Just minutes of climbing up rutted roads from a city mixing traditional African culture and markets with a Western-style mall (and Kentucky Fried Chicken) took us to a different planet. The photo on the mantel of one AIDS-ravaged woman showed she had once been a breath-takingly lovely professional woman.

Even now, as she mourned the flattening of her face-lines due to weight loss, she remained austerely beautiful.

And chastised Welile: “Welile! You are my daughter! A daughter visits her mother. Where have you been, Welile!”

A sheepish Welile replied, “Oh, Make, I’ve been a bad daughter. I promise I will visit more often.” I hope she has.

The most searing visit was to a house of corrugated tin, no utilities, surrounded by trash and worse. Inside a woman was fading into nothing. Her siblings lay listlessly on another bed. Amid the misery, they were addicted to drugs and alcohol. Parents were gone,

AIDS victims.

In the local dialect, Make Mary questioned the dying woman in business-like tones. How was she feeling? What had she had to eat? Out of food. So out to the truck for food.

Then more chatting. We waited for interpretation. Make Mary motioned Joan forward. “Take her picture.” Joan was uneasy. Violate her privacy as she lay there dying?

“She wants you to,” Make Mary confirmed.

So Joan took her picture. We could only guess that she wanted to be memorialized, to be known, to have counted in the world even as she faced leaving it.

We walked back to the truck. Make Mary said, “We visit because Jesus told us to care for the poor, the

**Others who have experienced it will recognize what had happened: In Welile’s culture, her family was our family, and our family theirs.**





sick, the dying. They are all his children. They are our brothers and sisters.” We got in the truck. Make Shongwe put in a gospel music tape. We sat there.

Soon our visiting was done. We had run out of food. There would be no more until more funds arrived.

We flew back to Dulles and lives overflowing with food, money, health resources. We ponder ways to tell of Welile, her homestead family, Make Mary, and Make Shongwe, her

mother who scolds her for not visiting, our sister in the shack. They are in our nest now. And families take care of their own.

—*Michael A. King, Telford, Pennsylvania, is pastor, Spring Mount (Pa.) Mennonite Church; president, Cascadia Publishing House, LLC; and editor, DreamSeeker Magazine. This column was first published in The Mennonite (June 5, 2007, p. 30), as a “Real Families” column.*



## Steppin’ Up to the Line

Polly Ann Brown

“Freedom Writers” extends the tradition of films in which a devoted, daring teacher eventually learns through a grueling process of trial and error and excruciating humiliation how to win over a classroom of students.

One glaring flaw of this latest teacher-as-hero film worked on me as no more than a minor irritant. While the movie applauds the rookie-teacher’s success at humanizing individuals by breaking down stereotypes, her colleagues are ruthlessly demonized (by the director) into silly caricatures of themselves.

Still, the movie was mostly believable. My reading-writing-teacher-self resonated with its main theme. It triggered memories and renewed my vision for what is possible in a classroom in which education is seen not as something that happens *to* people but as something that occurs *between* a teacher and students.

Before anything is possible in this story, however, the fresh-on-the-scene, starstruck teacher, Erin Gruwell (Hilary Swank) will need to have her idealistic fancying tempered. Dressed in fire-engine red with a strand of pearls circling her long white neck, she walks into a classroom of students qualified and eager

to break her in. They eye her menacingly, hurl insults, then render her invisible and agonizingly powerless: They turn their backs, cluster in their own conversational groups, throw things, fight, get up and walk out. This well-scripted scene realistically portrays a teacher's worst nightmare.

**B**ased on a true story that took place in Long Beach shortly after an explosion of post-Rodney King interracial gang fights, the classroom is but one of many battlegrounds for these students. Gradually, Ms. Gruwell notices that in the classroom, in the hallways, and in the fenced-in area outside the school, students huddle in groups that break down along skin color and ethnic lines. This isn't about choosing into or out of a particular group based on popularity or some arbitrary preference. This is territory staked out and boundaries drawn by birth and by blood. Loyalty to one's own group—Latino, African-American, and Cambodians—isn't a badge of honor; it's a matter of getting through the day alive.

"But remember," says the father to his teacher-daughter in one of the most memorable lines of the film: "You are not responsible for their lives outside of school." Our brave rookie-teacher tried to fly and crashed on that one. Before the first day, she wrote up lesson plans, decided on the book, vocabulary words, and other items she would teach. She naively believed her students would learn.

But after picking up the pieces from disastrous attempts to use the top-down approach, she learned this

lesson: She might not be *responsible for* students' lives outside of school—dangerous alliances, gang-fighting, domestic abuse, drugs. But she had better *respond* to their out-of-school experiences.

Real learning begins when Ms. Gruwell factors in the brutalizing effects of violence on her students' young lives. She shelves Homer's *Odyssey*, pushes desks and chairs aside, draws a line down the middle of the room, divides people into two groups, one on each side of the line, and meets her students where they are. In the process, she begins breaking down barriers between groups.

"If you have had a friend killed, step up to the line," she says. People hesitate, then slowly move forward, shuffling to the line, tips of toes barely touching, gang-bangers from warring groups looking into each other's eyes. This they have in common: They have lost a friend to violence. "Two friends?" she asks. Not everyone but too many. "Three friends?" A few.

"How many of you have heard of the Holocaust?" the teacher asks. The only white student in the group sheepishly raises his hand. No one else has heard of the Holocaust.

There is a way to release the talents of students who have been academically shut down by the negative, institutional baggage of low reading scores and labels and descriptors ("at risk," "not college material"). There is a way into the hearts and lives of human beings who have steeled themselves against a battering world by learning how to batter back.

"Write," Ms. Gruwell bids her

students. They accept the invitation because they ache to make themselves known. The seething anger, the terror, the quiet sorrows, the private agonies brim over and spill out onto blank notebook paper.

There is a way to tear down walls and bridge social and ethnic divisions. "Read your journal entries to each other," Ms. Gruwell urges. They also read *Anne Frank*, a book their low reading scores suggest they will not get, yet a book they get all too well.

Then it is time for a field trip to disturb a few notions about white folks. These unfolding images—students walking, in wide-eyed silence, through a Holocaust museum, taking in the stories of Holocaust survivors and the woman who hid the Frank family—dominate the film. They most strikingly illuminate how a journey into strange, unfamiliar territory can turn into a warm homecoming.

"Freedom Writers" is a riveting and realistic enactment of Paulo Freire's "pedagogy of hope." Get the dialogue going, bring out the truth, take students on an adventure of unveiling that will lift them out of the hellhole of their lives.

Ms. Gruwell's students begin to lay down their weapons and turn down the offer of drugs. An African-American young man whose warring ways have kept him on the streets is welcomed back into his mother's house. A black hand grasps a white hand in solidarity. Sacrificing family

bonds and risking her life, a Latina, from a courtroom stand, speaks truth that will free the African-American defendant.

**I**t is no wild leap to apply the film's lessons about the possibilities for dialogue and healing in human encounters on a broader scale.

**"Freedom Writers" makes clear that justice and peace are harvested from seeds sown in those places where I and Thou meet. . .**

Bringing justice and brokering peace in world trouble-zones, for example, begin with the invitation extended by the teacher in "Freedom Writers": Step up to the line, come to the negotiating table, make yourself known to the one who is feared, to the Other in whom, if grace is given, you will encounter God.

A family, a classroom of students, a corporate boardroom, a nation, the world, Martin Buber claimed, are built not of individuals but of living units of relation. "Freedom Writers" makes clear that justice and peace are harvested from seeds sown in those places where I and Thou meet, in the realm of the interhuman.

The kingdom of God is like the grain growing while no one watches (Mark 4:26), like the hidden leaven silently taking over the flour bin (Matt. 13:33). The late John Howard Yoder wrote that "who is in high office or what laws are written will make less difference . . . than the accumulation of an infinity of tiny deeds: mothers who feed their children, doctors who get their dosages right, policemen who hold their fire" (*For the Nations: Essays Public and Evangelical*, Eerd-

mans, 1997, p. 244). As “Freedom Writers” poignantly and powerfully reveals, the accumulation of deeds includes teachers whose basic impulse is to tap into their students’ longing to know and be known.

—Polly Ann Brown, *Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, is a retired educator.*

*She enjoys visits with four grown sons, their wives, six grandchildren (two on the way), attends Norris-town New Life Mennonite Church and St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, enjoys life at home with husband and dog, Brady, and trips away. She writes poetry and various other pieces on persons and matters deeply felt.*

### Fatherhood

While out cutting hay, I mowed into a wild turkey nest. I’d seen the hen, moving silently through the timothy. Taking flight, she spooked the horses. By the time I got my team settled down, they’d dragged the tines over the eggs. The six that didn’t break, I took along with me to home.

Ever since our white leghorn broody got eaten by a fox, we’ve put all unclaimed eggs under an old guinea hen. Because guineas are used to nesting on the ground, they can survive where a chicken can’t. They will drive off snakes and foil hungry dogs. I’ve even seen them take on the occasional raccoon.

Since a turkey egg is ten times larger than what a guinea lays, no matter how the little hen fluffed and ratched, her sitter could cover only half of the nest. Which is where the male came in. Seeing his spouse in such an unsettled state, He spread his wings, hopped onto the nest, and sat beside her.

Together, they managed to turn and hatch all six eggs. It was a strange sight to see turkey chicks follow those guinea fowl around. In two weeks the peeps were taller than the foster parents. Stranger still, the whole flock of guineas accepted the gangly. After roaming all day, they followed the guineas to their nightly roost.

Like turkeys, guinea chicks can’t fly right off. So for the first month, the hen broods her chicks on the ground, where dangers lies—foxes, skunks, coons, dogs, weasels, and snakes. That’s why the hen count in a flock of guineas gets low. So when Momma vanished, like her little orphans, we were not surprised.

We thought that would be the end of the turkeys, but, lo and behold, guess what happened? The male guinea took over the job of raising the six. Day in and day out, he never left them. Until the chicks could fly up to the safety of the trees, he sat with them, night after night, there on the ground.

—W. N. Richardson

## Why I Am A Mennonite Farmer

William Dellinger

### Prayer and Beginning

The winter sun is rising. In a grove of bare trees, I begin my morning prayers: “Lord father, mother, brother, sister, protect and flourish these trees, the land, and my family. Purify the land, air, water, and us from the sin of civilization.”

As I contemplate the subject of this article, and speculate how I became a Mennonite Christian and a farmer, I compare myself humbly to a tree in the forest. Does a tree ever decide to grow this way or that? Does it assign causal connections to the size and bend of branches? I doubt it. The tree, in a silent wisdom, is as it is, because that’s the way it “treed”, or in Christian terms, because that’s the way God made it.

In a similar sense, I am a Mennonite farmer because that’s the way God made me. But I’m not as wise as any tree, nor am I as full of God’s silent spirit, so I try to examine the rings and branches of my spiritual growth, even while realizing that the only cause of these effects is God.

Every generation of my family until my time had been farmers, since my ancestor Johann Georg

Döllinger and his wife Catherine Krayhenbuhl immigrated to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, in 1726, but I was not raised with the expectation of being a farmer, and there was no family farm.

Nonetheless, I decided to become a farmer after the birth of my first son thirty years ago, during the oil embargo of 1973. I was working at a gas station as an attendant, pumping gas and washing every window, mirror, and light of every customer's car. I saw close-

up the fear, anger, hatred, and boiling violence people held barely beneath the surface as they queued up for their daily dose of gasoline.

That small gas station, in a rural Midwestern town, had mile-long lines of enraged and fear-struck people. I'd never before or since seen or felt such imminent violence. I could see that eventually this violence and hate would be directed at someone, somewhere, as some war. And it has been, ever since.

I've been a pacifist since the early 1960s, and I could not bear the thought of fighting, killing, or being killed. I could not bear having my newborn son be required and taught to do the same, all for oil.

But I could not—and still cannot—imagine a vocation that would not participate in or encourage these energy wars. Examining just the least bit of history, energy wars were preceded by land wars or food wars. They

will be followed by more land wars, food wars, and water wars. How does any person live on this earth without participating in these wars or desiring to enjoy their spoils?

**War and violence are the systemic goldfish bowl of water we all swim in. My best escape, I thought, my best choice, was to live in rural isolation, and to farm**

Any of us who wants to be a moral person must eventually face this dilemma and deal with it as we can. But our situation is rather like that of a goldfish deciding whether to participate in water—war and violence are the systemic goldfish bowl of water we all swim in. My best escape, I thought, my best choice, was to live in rural isolation, and to farm.

### Farming

Farming is, of course, not the perfect choice for a pacifist, but I know of none better. This land was a battleground between the Missouri and the Osage, then later between those tribes pushed here by the westward white expansion. To the best of my knowledge, no treaty nor peaceable agreement passed on title to this land. I cannot deny I am the beneficiary of blood-soaked land. (While I'd like to pay reparations to the Missouri tribe, it is extinct. And how does one pay for wiping out a tribe and stealing its land?)

Neither is my farming removed from the oil economy. Although I do farm naturally, without chemicals or oil-based fertilizer, I also use a truck to carry produce to market, to deliver eggs, and to commute to several jobs to help support the farm.

But at least farming potentially produces clean food for people, with a minimum of environmental damage or demand for scarce resources, including oil. I am not free of the oil economy, but I could do worse. Farming is the best I know to do; it is the most moral vocation I could find.

I cannot deny that I also enjoy living in isolation, partly removed from the rush, noise, and stench of civilization. And it *is* a very small way. Since I did not inherit land, or kill indigenous people for land, I have to buy land, although a mortgage sometimes seems indistinguishable from lifelong rent. Even amid striving for simplicity and self-sufficiency, the purchase of land requires hard income. So a simple effort to depart a violent, resource-war economy can pull us back into the economy. We cannot simply quit the world; we have to pay for our release. One might say this is swimming in circles in a goldfish bowl while calling it open water.

### Becoming Mennonite

Somehow, being the regular flawed individual I am, overwork, exhaustion, nervousness, and stress for me lead to and become self-destructive behavior. Self-destructive behavior and self-hatred are companions; they are diseases that arise together. I realize this is my story, but I've seen the same story in many people, and I see it in you. Success becomes failure; doing what is correct and moral step-by-step leads to eventual defeat and self-hate.

Thus a life committed to remaining close to nature, to living spiritu-

ally and peaceably, can easily lead to a dark and hopeless existence. There is no way out, it seems, from the fishbowl. No escape. And the water is becoming dark and smelly.

Looking back, it seems that this encompassing darkness, the sense of failure in life (which everyone eventually faces), and the self-destructiveness of always working harder and earning ever more money is a cycle called "sin." There is no God in this, no love accepted from Jesus Christ. And one is never acceptable.

By chance, I was researching my family tree and discovered my first American ancestor had come to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, as a Mennonite refugee, then settled in Shenandoah County, Virginia, his farm at the farthest end of a long road. He was a farmer, but a Mennonite farmer, his wife the daughter of a Swiss Mennonite minister, Peter Krayhenbuhl. He had come to this place as a Mennonite seeking peace, and I wanted to know how he had sought peace and whether he had found it.

To belong to a church that seeks peace and to profess belief in a prophet and a God who promise peace has to mean more than simply voting for the most pro-peace candidate, although often there are none. Of course, I was also seeking peace in my own heart, and to me Jesus Christ is the prince of worldly peace, and also the prince of my peace.

Quietly and gradually I came to know God and Jesus in my search. It was like a soft rain that comes in gradually on a fall afternoon, but then continues steadily day after day.



The loneliness of sin (separation from God) has gone away. Although I sometimes sink, and begin to think I stand alone, this thankfully is a brief nightmare; I usually quickly recognize the darkness of pursuing some self-destructive goal.

Ironically, ambition, self-improvement, and self-development all have hurt me; what is important is that I am not important. There is nothing I have accomplished or ever will accomplish. I've

begun to relish anonymity, quiet, the cyclical sessions of my life, rather than the linear trajectory of a life shooting, like an arrow released from the bow, toward imagined success.

I am now looking at the virtue of humility as a reward of the Christian life and of growing with Jesus. I might have seen humility as a goal at some point, because being important is a burden, a weight upon the soul and heart, both spiritually and physically. To be in humble growth with Jesus is light and relieving, a continually amazing reward. I was raised and educated to be important, and it takes something to look at the world with these new eyes. It takes Jesus.

It is also a relief to live simply and frugally, and to be relieved from the distracting sins of over-consumption, greed, and comparison-shopping, in which buyers and sellers compare consumption patterns to those typical for their social class and age, and compare themselves to those successful, happy people. The pickup I drive, the food we eat, the clothes we wear, and the house we live in are all com-

pared to what the current class standards are (as clearly communicated by media) for our race, age, and education.

**For me, it is impossible to be part of the world as a fully participating capitalist. . . .**

Deviating from these norms causes people to wonder, to distrust, and in some ways to ostracize and persecute. But as a Christian, and particularly as a Mennonite, I am relieved of this burden of belonging, this burden of conformity. I am separate with Jesus.

Indeed, every Christian worldwide must be separate from this world. I realize this becomes more and more difficult for Christians, and potentially more illegal, but that's how sin works. It is not so easy not to sin and to remain in growth with Jesus. It is easy, and quickly rewarding, to rejoin the world.

For me, it is impossible to be part of the world as a fully participating capitalist—or as a communist or socialist, for that matter. While my heart is with Jesus, I just have no heart for profit, for acquisition, or for hierarchy—either to honor the existing hierarchy or to advance my position in the economic hierarchy. I just don't have the heart for it.

There is another important reason I am a Mennonite Christian: the intertwining of gentleness, love, and compassion. These are related and appear to me to be central to the spirit of Jesus and to the practice of Mennonites. This is also why I have always found Buddhism and Christianity to be so alike; these practices are important to both Buddha and Christ.

They serve me well, for farming can be violent: violent in the way a farmer treats his livestock, helpers, and family; violent in the way a farmer sees himself as king and lord, or servant; violent when a farmer thinks he owns land versus recognizing that the land owns him. Certainly gentleness and compassion are vital when working with animals, plants, and people. They matter also when working with tools, and machinery, with wood-working and blacksmithing, and with every breath and step I take.

This spirit of gentleness, love, and compassion are central to Jesus and the New Testament (2 Cor. 10:1). And I see that this is how Jesus has been with me.

### **Farming as a Mennonite Christian**

Although these days many might prefer to flee that legacy, Mennonites have often understood themselves to be the "quiet in the land." *Quiet*. The term implies more than it says.

David Augsburg speaks of three distinct stages of growth in a relationship with Jesus (*Dissident Discipleship, Braoz Press, 2006, p. 11*). The first stage is learning to love oneself and therefore to stop hurting oneself, to cease self-destructive behavior. While we all may strive to love our neighbor as ourselves, we forget perhaps to love ourselves first, then our neighbor in like regard. Experientially, I agree with this and see it in others and myself.

Derrick Jensen, an environmental anarchist, notes that cultures, families, governments, and nations relate

to themselves as they relate to their land base. Those cultures which spawn abusers of children, abusers of women, and rapists also destroy their own land, destroying, as it were, the very ground beneath their feet. Abusers are abusers, and the land base is another silent victim (*Endgame, vol. 1, Seven Stories Press, 2006, p. 155ff.*).

These same cultures and abusers will also become self-destructive and will over-produce, over-consume, and over-pollute until death—the death of the land, of the abuser, or of the victims. The abuser will engage in playground bullying on a local, national, and global scale until a victim strikes back, fulfilling the abuser's self-destruction.

Combining and synthesizing the thoughts of Augsburg and Jensen (which might shock or distress them both), I return again to the notion of Mennonites as the quiet in the land and as a peaceful people. I return again to my quiet in the land, and to my peace, and how I try to be a peacemaker in this land and with people. How do I, as a Mennonite farmer, intend to do this? How do I begin to grow in relationship with Jesus Christ, cease the encompassing sins of self-destruction, and learn to be quiet in the land?

I prefer to be practical here, rather than lofty and theoretical. The following are simple rules I pray for, even as I regretfully recognize some will offend us all individually:

*Refusing to accept government subsidies.* I pray this land will be part of the kingdom of God and not the



earthly human kingdom. Government subsidies buy control. They cause environmental destruction, collapse poorer nations' agricultural economies worldwide, and make welfare addicts of potentially free people.

*Refusing to use chemicals, including pesticides, insecticides, rodenticides, and herbicides.* Anything with the root word *cide* in it is not healthy to put on land or on food. Chemicals and chemical companies are expedient perhaps, but I cannot as a Mennonite Christian use these chemicals, or feed them to you, my neighbors.

*Eat no meat, raise no meat, and raise no meat for sale.* Raising livestock is the least efficient use of land, is cruel, and cannot preserve the environment. Corporate meat, large-scale livestock production, and the eating of meat are bad for people and the land base. It has to end.

*Use a minimum of oil and oil by-products.* Animal power must eventually suffice. Regardless of wars, price controls, and subsidies, there is a finite oil supply. We are always limited today to this day's sunlight energy, and using any more manufactured energy is false economy. It would be even better if intensive agriculture used solely human power, but that involves work, and might even be so extreme as to involve white people in work. This too may be far distant in the future, but it will come.

"The trees of the field clap their hands" (Isa. 55). *Farm every field as a garden.* Prefer birds, insects, and beauty over industrial cleanliness and order. Remember that God's first creative act upon earth was to create a

garden, then the gardeners. It is our God-given destiny to reclaim and restore the garden.

*Pray at the start and end of the day.* Pray before entering or leaving the garden, before seeding, before weeding, and before harvest. Pray a hedgerow around your lands (Job 1:10).

*Farm quietly.* Farm quietly so that you can hear the singing of the birds, frogs, and insects, and the singing and whistling of the farmer. If you do not hear such music, something is wrong with the farmer; with the birds, frogs, and insects; or with the farming.

*Farm small.* Farm so small that you know your land and land base like the back of your hands. Get to know your hands.

*Plant a tree for every day of your life, to help pay your debt to earth.*

*Grow one-half of your gardens for the poor.* Grow that half for biological and institutional widows and orphans. Give the harvest away without expecting praise or reward. Become poor, become nameless.

*Do not develop, grow, or eat artificial or ungodly life forms.* This includes engineered plants or animals or any life form owned by anyone other than God.

*Do not own, encourage, acknowledge as real, or work for any artificial being.* This includes machines, computers, and corporations.

*Become the quiet in the land.*

—William Döllinger (Dellinger) is a farmer and member of Mt. Pisgah Mennonite Church, Cherry Box, Missouri.

## Kurt Vonnegut Among the Iconoclasts

*Abraham, Erasmus,  
Anabaptists, and Atheists*

Kent Davis Sensenig

Is it possible for Christians to be edified by atheists? In the case of (recently deceased) American novelist Kurt Vonnegut, this Christian says yes!

After all, both Jews and Christians living in the Roman Empire were accused of "atheism" for their monotheistic refusal to worship the pagan (and plural) gods of their age. I would argue a similar kind of "iconoclasm" characterized Vonnegut's writing. Abraham (as narrated in Genesis, but even more so in the Qur'an) is the father of this idol-rejecting tradition. In the Qur'an, Abraham actually gets to smash idols; in Genesis he simply rejects the paganism of his fathers and then skips town!

The sojourning Abe of Genesis resonates more with my own migratory, "quiet-in-the-land," more flight-than-fight Mennonite tradition. Following Zwingli's lead, however, the feisty, sixteenth-century Anabaptist ancestors of the Mennonites embraced the

(even idol-smashing) tradition of Abraham; thousands of them got sacrificed to the sometimes voracious gods of church and state as a result.

The liberal seventeenth-century Dutch Mennonites—called “Collegiants”—even published the “heretical” (well ahead of his time) Jewish philosopher Spinoza, when no respectable Christian (or Jew) would touch his heterodox ideas. One way to view even the modern atheism that emerged from the Enlightenment (following Spinoza’s lead) is that it was rightly rejecting distorted versions of God, faith, church, and scriptural interpretation that had grown up during centuries of Christendom.

Don’t get me wrong; I am all for keeping the Living God at the heart of one’s tradition. It’s just that, each generation, this requires rejecting the false gods always vying for the Creator’s part, which can get you branded an atheist, heretic, communist or worse, as Vonnegut understood.

Vonnegut made a major impact on my worldview, almost without my realizing it. I read many of his wacky novels for fun in high school and college, then set him aside for years. Maybe the age at which I engaged Vonnegut reflects what some might call an adolescent streak in his writing.

Despite his zany style, I believe Vonnegut remains one of the quintessential American writers. If so, perhaps he followed the tradition of Laurel and Hardy and Charlie Chaplin more than Hemmingway or Faulkner. Mark Twain is the most obvious comparison in the world of American letters.

Vonnegut was also a truly decent man who gave the term *humanist* a good name. We sometimes forget that the humanist cause is a Christian invention; there was no more profoundly “humanitarian” act than God becoming one of us!

The critical Catholic of the Reformation era, Erasmus, was one of the founding fathers of modern humanism. For Erasmus, being a humanist entailed championing a return to the sources of the Greek New Testament (and its pacifism).

His sometimes scathingly satirical attacks on the political-religious follies of his day—especially warfare—not only significantly influenced the Anabaptists, but could be seen as a key predecessor to Vonnegut’s work.

Vonnegut’s life embodied many of the dilemmas and paradoxes of modern-turning-postmodern American life. His life spanned (and helped articulate) the dark tide that surged from the cultural watersheds of World War II into Vietnam and now Iraq. His most famous novel, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, captured one of the great cultural cataclysms in American history: the Allied fire-bombing of Dresden, Germany, toward the end of our last “good war.”

Vonnegut survived this massive massacre due to imprisonment as an American POW in an underground meat locker. When he emerged from this bunker, he was put on corpse duty and witnessed the cremation of up to 300,000 Dresden civilians. A cultural treasure of Germany, Dresden held no strategic military value.

The spiritual meaning of Dresden—with which America has never come to terms—is that we possess the technological and ideological willpower to massacre folk on a large scale, in the name of high ideals (i.e. demonic nihilism, a force already present among American elites before the appearance of the A-bomb, whose production was simply a symptom of the disease). Vonnegut was a first-hand witness to this uncomfortable American truth.

*Slaughterhouse-Five* was also a *tour-de-force* in bringing a postmodern consciousness to American literature, in that Vonnegut presented his horrific story in fragmented, fantastical, and (as always with Vonnegut) darkly comedic ways. The book was published in 1969 at the nadir of the Vietnam War, capturing the spirit of the age and catapulting him out of relative obscurity. It belatedly joined Norman Mailer’s *The Naked and the Dead* and Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22* as one of the great (and anti-war) World War II novels.

After 15 years of trying (and failing) to write about the trauma of Dresden, Vonnegut finally realized that such horrors could not be presented in a conventional fashion. The kaleidoscopic images of Revelation come to mind as a precursor to this “new” style.

A classic example of Vonnegut’s dark humor is his candid acknowledgment that he was the only person in the world to have benefited from the fire-bombing of Dresden, esti-

mating he made \$5 dollars for each German corpse via his novel sales. That was Vonnegut!

Vonnegut came from a professional Midwestern family (architects from Indiana; along with David Letterman, Larry Bird, and perhaps Mennonites Harold Bender and Orie Miller, Vonnegut was one of the greatest of “Hoosiers”). Despite their middle-class status, his family experienced real poverty during the Great Depression, so Vonnegut always had a “bleeding heart” for the working-class.

He was a lonely child whose best friend growing up was his African-American cook. The heartfelt stories of virtue and compassion she told him would never be effaced in Vonnegut, even by the relentless cynicism that came with being wide-eyed in imperial America. So he cared about minorities and the marginal.

He also was a picked-upon nerd in school who barely made it through college. Even his M.A. lit thesis was rejected by his faculty committee. In college he gained a reputation for practical jokes. He would show up at finals for classes in which he wasn’t enrolled, then shock everyone by shredding the exam in front of the professor and calmly walking out of class.

Just as he shipped out to World War II, Vonnegut’s mother committed suicide. The causes appear to have included alcohol and pill abuse mixed with deep financial anxieties—again, a quintessentially American vicious cycle. Vonnegut also struggled with

**He was a lonely child whose best friend growing up was his African-American cook.**

depression throughout his life (while making millions laugh for decades). He attempted suicide himself in the 1980s.

Yet he found enough hope to keep on living to the ripe old age of 84, God bless him. Even the G. W. Bush presidency didn't crush his spirits. In the early 1960s he adopted his sister's three children after they were suddenly orphaned. He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

**I**n the 1950s—before he was able to make a living writing—Vonnegut worked as a PR pitchman for General Electric and as a car salesman, two quintessential post-war American occupations. These alienating experiences informed Vonnegut's other great themes (beyond his adamant opposition to war and nationalism): the deadening cultural, spiritual, and ecological effects of a globalizing corporate consumerism; the ominous illusions of technological progress and “quick fixes”; and the lies of advertising. (Be careful what you pretend to be, he would tell us, for you will become your mask.)

At first I thought that Vonnegut's dying during the Bush Administration's waning months and days was somehow a defeat. Vonnegut was an avowedly political writer, who once said, “I agree with Stalin, Mussolini, and Hitler that writers should serve the people of their nation”—more classic Vonnegut. Now I realize that Vonnegut's legacy will endure and

**I believe Vonnegut was attracted to Jesus—most of what he stood for resonates with Jesus' Way.**

bear good fruit, whereas “Dubya's” will blow away like chaff in the Holy Spirit's wind, for God takes up into the divine life all good deeds (even if “no good deed goes unpunished” on earth).

I believe Vonnegut was attracted to Jesus—most of what he stood for resonates with Jesus' Way. And I expect when they meet on the Resurrection Day they will embrace. Of course, as will be true for all of us, Vonnegut took plenty of wounds, sins, and chaff of his own to the grave. He will need the healing touch of our Creator-Redeemer.

**P**erhaps I'm getting sentimental in my old age, but Vonnegut meant a lot to me. He gave voice to things that needed to be said for several generations of truth-seekers in America, in ways full of compassion and a self-deprecating humor that candidly acknowledged his own demons.

Yet he rarely flinched from looking at the ugly truths of our world, not only in *Slaughterhouse Five*, but also in such novels as *Breakfast of Champions*, *Deadeye Dick* (my personal favorite), *Cat's Cradle*, *Galapagos*, *Bluebeard*, and *Player Piano*. He is the kind of writer whose books flow into one another . . . like life. Some of his alter-ego characters reappear in several books. His novels are easy to read, though you'll be either attracted to or repulsed by the cynical, over-the-top nature of this prophet's style.

I found it humorous that one of the criticisms of his work cited in his

*Los Angeles Times* obituary was that it was “too popular and accessible.” Wouldn't want common people to understand what you're saying!

One of the greatest of the “greatest generation” of Americans—those who knew war and real economic hardship, even if they moaned about it just like any generation would—has passed on. But he did not “go quietly into that good night.” That wasn't the Vonnegut way. *Piss and vinegar* and “leave them laughing as you go” was.

—*Kent Davis Sensenig, Pasadena, California, is writing a dissertation on John Howard Yoder and Wendell Berry at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena. His wife Jennifer pastors at Pasadena Mennonite Church. Through the grace of his peace-loving tradition, family, and creation itself he believes in the God of Jesus Christ. He reports, however, that if the violent one turns out to be the real deal, he would sooner go to hell than worship him.*



## Just Between You and Me

Noël R. King

I was walking through the Wal-Mart, searching for a trashcan for my yard, and there she was: my imaginary friend from 30 years before.

“Stella??” I felt faint.

“Richie??” She seemed exceedingly pleased to see me, greeting me just as one would always hope and expect to be greeted by a long-lost imaginary friend.

“Oh, my living stars,” I said. “You’re REAL?”

“*Me* real? What about *you* being real?” she said. “I thought I dreamed you up back there. I mean, you were really brave, jumping off tall buildings and all that other stuff you did with me.”

I laughed. “No, *you* were brave! You told my recess teacher not to yell at me again. That was far more brave.”

“We were something else back then, us two, you know?” She dipped and twirled and shimmied as she stepped aside to let a shopper pass us in the aisle.

Then, “Well, but how come my mom and dad could never see you, then?” I asked. “Nor that teacher either—even though she never yelled at me again.”

“And *my* mom and dad couldn’t see you, either,” she said. “They just laughed and said how fun for me

to have a friend that only I could see, then I saw them wink behind my back.”

I pulled a trashcan off the shelf and put it on my head. “I can’t see them either, ha ha ha!”

“Yeah,” said Stella. I heard her faintly through the can. “I think I was adopted.”

“What?” I said. The trashcan smelled like Elmer’s glue. It echoed in my head.

“My real parents were imaginary,” Stella said, “so then I got adopted and had way too many parents.”

“Oh,” I said. “My goodness.”

“Yeah,” said Stella. “A lot of people don’t know that about me.”

I took the trashcan off my head and followed Stella to her house, a street and place I’d been to in dreams before.

We walked the walkway curved

around her yard. Abruptly, something hit and pushed me into a bush.

“Ow!” I said. “What was that?!”

“Randy!” she yelled. “What in the world?! You go help her up, right now!”

I got up out of the bush (it was green and smelled of tea) and saw a teenage boy, bewildered, cross. “Help *who* up, Ma? You crazy now, or what?”

“Oy,” I said to my best friend of old. “We’re STILL imaginary friends, I see.”

“Oooh, this is so great!” she laughed. “I *love* imaginary friends, don’t you?”

“Ma?” her son said. “Ma?”

*—As circumstances warrant, through her Turquoise Pen column Noël R. King, Scottsville, Virginia, reports on strange and wonderful things, including friends imaginary and not.*

**“Oy,” I said to my best friend of old. “We’re STILL imaginary friends, I see.”**



## A Mennonite Police Chief

Truman H. Brunk

**G**eorge and Nancy had been attending the church for ten years. They made a great addition—both were well-known and respected in the community. George was chief of police, and Nancy was a nurse supervisor at the local hospital.

One morning, a call came from George explaining that Nancy had just received results from medical tests, and the diagnosis was cancer. They were devastated. Would I come and pray with them? Of course I would. I asked if I could bring along Harold, their good friend and neighboring farmer.

Together the four of us knelt to pray. We poured out our hearts asking for a miracle. As we stood together, I took Nancy's hand and assured her of the church's great love for the family and that we would commit ourselves to ongoing prayer. Then I added, "It would be such a blessing for you and George to come into membership in our congregation."

Even while I spoke, I asked myself, *Could I be in trouble here? These folks have been attending for years, and is there a reason they have not become members?*

Our church took a strong stand against guns and violence. Would a police chief belong in a "peace"

church? Would the elders say I had overstepped my privileges? I was assaulted by doubts.

Two weeks later, following the benediction, George was the first to greet me at the front of the church, announcing, "Nancy and I would like to pursue membership." Surely this was good news! But what if someone objected?

In the coming days and weeks, George told me his story. When he was still a young man, the local chief of police approached him and explained, "We are looking for some clean-cut young men to join our force."

When George reported this conversation to his parents, his Mennonite father gave his consent. His German Reformed mother was reluctant, saying, "I don't think a Christian should carry a gun."

After giving it a lot of prayerful consideration, George made a promise to his mother. He promised that, although he would have to carry a gun, he would never point it toward a human being. His parents were sat-

isfied and gave their blessing. Forty years later, George was telling me that he had kept his promise.

George and Nancy joined the membership class, testifying of their faith in God and their desire to join themselves to Blooming Glen Mennonite Church. Their classmates heard George's story of being an officer who kept the peace. Then the whole church heard their story.

On a beautiful Sunday morning, George and Nancy knelt in the front of the church and were baptized. Miracles happen! There were no objections—only a warm welcome from all the church family.

—*Truman H. Brunk, a semi-retired pastor, lives in Harrisonburg, Virginia, with wife Betty, a retired social worker. He is currently part-time pastor of students at Eastern Mennonite Seminary. This story was first published in his new book, That Amazing Junk-Man: The Agony and Ecstasy of a Pastor's Life (DreamSeeker Books, 2007).*

**He promised that, although he would have to carry a gun, he would never point it toward a human being.**





## Being Quiet

Deborah Good

*“We can make our minds so like still water that beings gather about us that they may see, it may be, their own images, and so live for a moment with a clearer, perhaps even with a fiercer life because of our quiet.” —W. B. Yeats*

I am not very good at “quiet,” at allowing for open spaces in my life, breathing and still. I have a well-practiced habit of filling my silent moments with noise and productivity, the open slots on my calendar with people and plans.

But just weeks ago I moved for the summer from the bustle of Philadelphia to a small community in the woods of West Virginia. I left behind several different involvements and jobs, church and friends and soccer teams. I moved from a neighborhood block of easily two hundred people to a tract of land in the Blue Ridge Mountains blanketed with trees.

My first night here, I went on a walk around dusk. I saw *fourteen deer*—nearly twice the number of people who live within walking distance of my new home.

I awoke this morning without an alarm—something I never did in my old life. I heated the stove for oatmeal, then threw in sunflower seeds, walnuts, a spoon’s worth of brown sugar, and raisins, which bulked up in the boiling water. I ate my oatmeal, fed the cat, and threw on old jeans ripped at the knees.

The garden is in its birthing stages now. Red- and green-leaf lettuce are up. The peas’ tender leaves spring from rows of shoots standing proudly in the morning sunlight. Today, we planted tomatoes, digging holes into the mountain clay, laying in compost. “Grow, little plant, where we plant you,” said Vivian, a woman in her sixties who teaches me about vegetables and birds, who notices tiny seedlings and animal footprints on our walks through the woods. “Grow, grow, grow,” she says.

We broke for lunch and then for community prayers—just the two of us today—for which we sat mostly in silence, read a psalm. Afterward, we parted ways for the afternoon. I walked home down one woodsy path, Vivian another. In the hours since, I’ve gone on a short hike, napped, read, checked e-mail, and watched the rain fall, all the while trying to find a way through my writer’s fog—not a complete “writer’s block” but a fog I navigated with patience and procrastination—to this space where I now sit, typing.

**T**his is more quiet than I have ever known.

**S**hortly before moving here, I was describing my summer plans to a (slightly older and wiser) friend over breakfast. “If I get too bored, I’ll just make trips to be with friends in the city,” I told him.

“No, if you get bored,” he said, “I think you need to stick it out, sit with the boredom, and not run away.”

**This is more quiet than I have ever known.**

“Oh, you’re such a Trappist,” I said, laughing. This same friend used to teach high school and once took a dozen or so of us students to visit a Trappist monastery in Massachusetts. The Trappists are a Roman Catholic religious order known for their disciplined silence.

We read Frank Bianco’s *Voices of Silence* (Anchor, 1992), in preparation for the trip. In it, a monk describes how inner “monsters” came out during his initial months of silence, all the memories and emotions, self-dislike, and unprocessed experiences he had locked away in his unconscious.

I pictured these figurative monsters living in my own dark chasms. With enough idle solitude and silence, I imagined they would emerge from their cages, drooling, growling, flailing their arms and legs. They would take seats in a circle and glare at me with eyes like small oceans and mouths like fire.

Perhaps this is why we, as a general rule, are so afraid of being quiet, idle, and alone. We practically shun it. I know that as a young, single woman in the city, I often preferred to surround myself with people and noise lest anyone, and most of all myself, think I was a loner, shy and antisocial, quietly becoming an old maid.

**W**andering through a bookstore in Denver, I came across Florence Falk’s recent book, *On My Own: The Art of Being a Woman Alone* (Random House, 2007). It was refreshing to read the jacket, to hear the author

countering assumptions about singlehood, especially for women, by claiming that solitude is ripe with possibility.

She describes two opposing impulses in our lives: “One causes us to yearn to make close connections with others, and the other pulls us back into ourselves, into the need for selfhood and certainty that can only be shaped through solitude.”

“We must heed both,” she continues, “But in our modern culture, the former is stressed while the latter is neglected, even vilified.”

I, too, stress connection. I *am* a social person and invest much of my energy in building relationships. Perhaps what has been most interesting to me about my solitude this summer is how *not* solitary it is. Others in this small community seek me out—and I them—for lunch, gardening, hiking, and trips into town.

Twice a week, I spend my afternoon teaching writing to high schoolers. Even though I live down a gravel road in the Blue Ridge Mountains, I am connected to just about everyone I know in the world by cell phone and internet (via satellite). In the weeks since I moved here, I have written letters and emails, made trips to visit friends, and started a blog. True solitude would require another plan altogether.

Even so, this time away from the city will have me looking at my life from new vantage points. “Without a certain element of solitude there can be no compassion,” writes the late Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk

and one of our history’s experts on silence. “When a [person] is lost in the wheels of a social machine, he is no longer aware of human needs as a matter of personal responsibility” (*New Seeds of Contemplation*, New Directions Publishing, 1974, p. 55).

He goes on to describe a solitude that is *not* a separation or escape from all that is ugly and difficult in the larger world, from people we dislike or problems we do not want to face. Merton’s solitude is one of engagement, of growing a compassion in our inner gardens that allows us to connect more deeply with others outside ourselves and, above all else, with God.

Whether I am looking for communion with God or improved mental health—or both—I cannot say. It is hard to put words to these things. But either way, my yearning for solitude has brought me to these mountains. I am learning to step into my days like open fields, to be quiet, idle, and alone—and to not be afraid of any of the three.

—*Deborah Good, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, is a summer writer-in-residence at Rolling Ridge Study Retreat Community (www.rollingridge.net) near Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. Twenty-five years ago, she and her family took a five-month retreat from their lives in D.C., and lived—without electricity—in a small cottage at Rolling Ridge, which has since acquired electricity, among other things. She welcomes your thoughts and feedback at <deborahagood@gmail.com>.*

## “Spiderman 3”: Grace-fully Flawed

Dave Greiser

After reading one of my recent reviews, my son asked me, “Do you ever review movies that weren’t very good?” It was a good question. On reflection I answered that, since I usually write four reviews per year for *Dreamseeker Magazine*, I try to choose films that are excellently made and thought-provoking. I don’t review enough films to indulge in the twisted pleasure of panning bad films. Why take up valuable time on a flawed movie?

But this time I will. “Spiderman 3” is a film with significant flaws. By the time you read this review, you may well have already heard or decided for yourself that the film is too long, that its plot tries to accomplish too much, and that the amazing special effects fail to redeem the presence of underdeveloped characters and over-acted sequences. Not to mention Kirsten Dunst’s abominable singing.

All true. The presence of not one but three villains makes for some confused viewing. I would have preferred one well-developed villain, with the others saved for the inevitable future installments. The film drags in spots—I found myself sleepy after the first 45 minutes. And my feminist sensibilities were strained

by the amount of attention the film paid to the old damsel-in-distress routine. I suspect that this aspect of Spiderman's comic book origins is still caught in an Eisenhower-era time warp.

And yet, this was my favorite installment in the Spiderman series. I found more psychological, cultural, and even theological grist in this film than any film I have seen in recent memory. For those with eyes to see, "Spiderman 3" poses questions about life, fate, community, choice, grace, and human nature that would make the early church theologian Augustine proud.

**A**n abbreviated plot summary: As the film opens, things are going swimmingly for Peter Parker, alias Spiderman (reprised for the third time by Tobey Maguire). Spiderman's popularity as a superhero is at its peak in New York City. Peter has declared his love for his girlfriend MJ (Kirsten Dunst) and is getting ready to pop the question. Of course, he still lives in the same dump of an apartment, but you can't have everything. (Moral: If crime does not pay, ditto for crime fighting.)

But trouble looms, in multiple forms. Peter's old friend Harry Osborn (played by Topher Grace) harbors a grudge, because Harry believes that Peter/Spiderman killed his father, the villainous Green Goblin (cameoed by Christopher Walken). Moreover, Flint Marko (Thomas Haden Church), the stick-up artist who killed Peter's uncle, has escaped from prison and traveled through a

nuclear testing zone in which radiation has morphed him into the Sandman—a creature made from living sand.

If all this weren't enough, a parasitic substance from outer space called Venom has come to earth. Venom has gotten into Spiderman's suit, turning it jet-black and enhancing Spiderman's powers while infecting him with an overweening pride.

Together, this trio of nemeses makes for an unwieldy storyline. Yet each villain serves to evoke the kind of deeper metaphors that make this film irresistible to a pop theologian.

The Harry vs. Peter grudge is a study in the nature of revenge. Harry has sworn to avenge his father's death by killing Spiderman. But did Spiderman actually kill Harry's villainous father? Does Harry know the full story? Questions of factual accuracy (Where were the weapons of mass destruction?) and motivation frequently remain unasked when revenge-minded people rush to judgment. Can Harry and his friend Peter be reconciled before someone gets hurt?

Then there's the tortured presence of Flint Marko/Sandman. Desperate to help his sick daughter, Marko has broken out of prison. He, too, is bent on revenge against Spiderman, for sending him to jail.

Marko's estranged wife tells him, "You're guilty, guilty as sin."

But Marko replies, "I am not bad. I had bad luck. I *want* to do good."

While Marko stalks Spiderman, Spiderman also harbors a grudge against this man who killed his beloved uncle. Will one of the men fi-

nally gain his revenge, or can they reconcile their differences?

Third, there is the Venom, that impersonal yet satanic, extra-terrestrial substance that invades Spiderman's suit and draws a promethean shadow side out of his nature. The new Peter/Spiderman hits on unimpressed women and entertains fantasies of brutally subduing adversaries. Interestingly, Spiderman's climactic confrontation with his dark side takes place in a church.

There is, as I said, ample material for reflecting on theological anthropology here. Humanity's double nature is a theme throughout the film. The apostle Paul's dilemma, "I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out," is personified by all the major characters. The bad guys have a human side; likewise, the chief good guy must confront pride, anger, and lust for revenge.

The question of predestination and free will makes an appearance. In a key scene near the end of the film, Spiderman explains to Flint Marko that, despite life's unfair events, "Everyone

has a choice. We are our actions."

Then there is the necessity of community. As Peter revels in Spiderman's popularity and his ability to solve crimes singlehandedly, his girlfriend MJ reminds him, "We all need help sometimes, Peter. Even Spiderman. This pride of his—maybe he's not perfect."

Finally there's the theme of grace. Without revealing too much, let me simply say that the theme of forgiveness plays an unexpected role in this film.

I take pleasure in movies that unintentionally display elements of a Christian view of the world. It's unlikely that "Spiderman 3" will be nominated by the Academy for best picture. Its flaws are substantial and well documented. Nevertheless, just like flawed human beings, this film contains the unmistakable mark of One who cannot, finally, be hidden.

—*Dave Greiser's black Spiderman suit lies hidden in a box at Hesston (Kan.) College, where it makes occasional unwelcome appearances in his classes in Bible and ministry.*

**Just like flawed human beings, this film contains the unmistakable mark of One who cannot, finally, be hidden.**



## Peacemaking—The Walk and the Talk

Daniel Hertzler

*Smoke Jumping on the Western Fire Line*, by Mark Matthews. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 2006.

*A Precarious Peace*, by Chris K. Huebner. Herald Press, 2006.

*The Fragmentation of the Church and Its Unity in Peacemaking*, edited by Jeffrey Gros and John D. Rempel. Eerdmans, 2001.

Of the making of books on peace there is no end, and probably there are more books on talking about than practicing peace. More talk than walk. Two of the three books in this review are talkies. Yet each in its own way makes a point worth hearing.

Matthews is a journalist, and a major source for his book was Roy Wenger, director of Civilian Public Service Camp No. 103, the smoke jumpers camp. After being interviewed himself, he helped find other interviewees and provided various resources, including his own three-volume self-published book. I found this fascinating material, although to follow the organization and the pacing was sometimes a challenge. Yet the

nature of the book kept me reading, including even the appendix, which is made up of 42 letters written by George H. Robinson to his wife.

To provide background on Civilian Public Service in World War II, Matthews includes a chapter on “Conscientious Objection in America” and one on “The Historic Peace Churches” so that readers not familiar with these subjects can understand why a group of COs turned up at Camp 103 near Missoula, Montana, one of many civilian public service sites for conscientious objectors in World War II.

From here on he has the usual problems of how to organize the material, whether chronologically or topically. The book is one-third through before he introduces “Birth of Smoke Jumping” and nearly half-way through when the men are taking practice jumps. Because Matthews worked from interviews and personal recollections, he had access to anecdotes which he has sprinkled throughout the book. He also includes background material on various persons; in some cases more than I really wanted to know.

Among the more entertaining stories is the account of Florence Wenger’s experience. She was the wife of camp director Roy Wenger and dietitian at the camp. A well-built woman, five feet, four inches tall, and weighing 140 pounds, she wanted to jump on fires. She went through all the training exercises with the men

**We learn that it was not until decades later, in 1981, that a woman was finally permitted to jump on fires.**

but was not allowed by the Forest Service to fight fires. “No official seemed willing to take the responsibility for letting her go any further” (130). “In private, Florence expressed her disappointment, referring to the Forest Service brass as ‘a bunch of waffle-bottoms’” (131).

We learn that it was not until decades later, in 1981, that a woman was finally permitted to jump on fires. One Diane Shulman sued the Forest Service for the privilege. Matthews reports that “Before she died in 1989, Florence recalled, ‘I’ve always felt a bit cheated. I could have been the first woman smoke jumper. Alas, I was ahead of my time’” (131).

At the end of the book, Matthews observes that “smoke jumping remains one of the few environmentally friendly jobs that still offer excitement and romance to young people. Each spring the Forest Service is overwhelmed with applications for a handful of rookie smoke jumper positions” (269).

One of the points made emphatically in the book is that two minutes of romance in the air were followed by hours of grubby and exhausting work on the ground. Nevertheless, the last quote in the book is from Merlo M. Zimmerman: “Thinking back, what can compare to the foot on the step, the rugged mountain below, the tap on the shoulder, hit the silk. . . . You said it, ‘Life at its fullest’” (269).

**T**he next two books both acknowledge their indebtedness to John



Howard Yoder, a missionary for peace. He was also a missionary but became known for peace advocacy.

I seem to remember Stanley Hauerwas saying that Yoder “converted only one person: me.” That was typical Hauerwas hyperbole. But it is interesting to notice that after Hauerwas left Notre Dame to teach ethics at Duke University, a group of young Mennonites found him there. Now they have published *A Precarious Peace*, described as *Yoderian Explorations on Theology, Knowledge and Identity*. This is the first in “a series intended for conversation among academics, ministers, and laypersons regarding knowledge, beliefs, and the practices of the Christian faith.”

Like a number of Yoder’s own books, this one is a compilation of articles and speeches from a variety of sources. Hauerwas, who wrote the foreword, comments that “Huebner is a philosopher in theological disguise” and that “Huebner’s book should be impossible to ignore, not only because of the sources he engages but because he addresses the central philosophical and theological challenges before us.” On the other hand, Mennonites may be troubled by it, because “Huebner is unrelenting in his attempt to unsettle the presumption that Mennonites have ‘got peace down’” (10, 11). So let us be worried.

In the introduction, Huebner acknowledges his debt to Yoder, quotes him repeatedly, and states his own effort as “an attempt to spell out and grapple with the significance of Yoder’s claim that Christian theology is not finally the expression of a prefer-

ence for peace over against violence, at least if that assumes that peace is somehow intelligible apart from theological reflection and display.”

The introduction closes with a Yoder quote summarizing the guiding principle for all of his theological work: “That Christian pacifism which has a theological basis in the character of God and the work of Jesus Christ is one in which the calculating link between our obedience and ultimate efficacy has been broken, since the triumph of God comes through resurrection and not through effective sovereignty or assured survival” (31). If I understand this statement, it calls upon us to concentrate on obedience rather than in trying to make history come out right.

The book then develops in three sections: “Disestablishing Mennonite Theology,” “Disowning Knowledge,” and “Dislocating Identity.” In the first of these, Huebner asserts that “the Mennonite church has always existed amid dual pressures toward closure and openness. It is doomed to being simultaneously conservative and liberal” (37). A good point. Why did I never think to say that myself?

At the end of the second section, he observes that

Christians are a diasporic people who know that they can be at home anywhere. So perhaps what is most important is that Christians embody faithful practices of knowledge—to see the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity as epistemological witness—so that they can operate anywhere

precisely because they do not feel the need to control knowledge by fixing it in some settled somewhere called the university. (144)

The third section includes a chapter on medical ethics in which Huebner features his grandmothers, one of whom contracted Alzheimer’s disease. The theme of the chapter is the importance of memory as in “Remember who you are,” an exhortation to young persons to behave. One grandmother was inclined to lay this message on her children. But he asserts that the other one, who lost much of her memory, still “remembers it to the extent that I and others are there to help remember it for her. But that is, after all, as it should have been all along” (175).

In the final chapter, an epilogue sermon, based on Jesus’ triumphal entry and the Christ hymn in Philippians 2, he asserts that church should “be a place where we can be honest with one another, where we can be vulnerable to one another and in so doing become open to the possibility of forgiveness. But the great failure of the church is that it often ceases to be such a place” (211). Well, yes.

The third book is based on a consultation of the U.S. Faith and Order Commission of the National Council of Churches. The book is a reminder of why it is so hard to get a consensus against war among denominations. It reminds me of how in 1991 the World Council of Churches passed an action

opposing all wars, then rescinded it four hours later.

The book is dedicated to John Howard Yoder, “Servant of the churches and their peacemaking calling and their unity in obedience to the kingdom of Christ.” Essays from 11 persons represent 10 denominations. As the title indicates, the consultation was concerned with both Christian

**The book is a reminder of why it is so hard to get a consensus against war. . . .**

unity and peace, but the essays emphasize particularly denominational positions on war and peace.

Two essays by Mennonites are included along with writers speaking for Lutherans, the Orthodox,

Catholics, Church of the Brethren, Quakers, the Reformed, Pentecostals, Baptists, and Churches of Christ. Such breadth resists generalization, but several things stand out.

One is a report by Mennonite John Rempel that when Historic Peace Church delegates urged on other participants the pacifist position, someone inquired about the practice of conscientious objection by the peace churches in World War II. “To the consternation of most of those present, the Mennonites confessed that just over half of their members had been conscientious objectors, while the Brethren had only 20 percent and the Quakers 10” (38).

But Rempel ends his chapter by asserting that “The movement in the World Council of Churches and various denominations to reassert the inseparability of ecclesiology and ethics and to take ethical heresy as seriously as doctrinal heresy provides common



resources for peacemaking not just as an ideal but as a way of life” (46, 47).

The representatives at the conference write on behalf of characteristic emphases of their own denominations. John H. Erickson reports that “on the whole I would say that we Orthodox have tended to insist more on justice than on peace” (56).

Donald F. Durnbaugh provides a history of the Church of the Brethren leading up to their current emphasis on ecumenical relations. James F. Puglisi speaks on behalf of Catholics for Christian unity and peace. He proposes that “It is now up to the Catholic faithful to take up this challenge and begin to realize it in the daily living out of its vision” (102).

A well-reasoned statement is by Lois Y. Barrett, who joined the Mennonite church “at the age of 23, amid the Vietnam War” (168). She observes that “Peacemaking is not sustainable as an individual ethic; it requires a community. The church is a community where believers learn the culture, if you will, of the holy nation, the practices that make peacemaking a possibility” (178).

I find this of particular interest in light of Murray Dempster’s chapter “Pacifism in Pentecostalism: The Case of the Assemblies of God.” I had heard that the Assemblies were once a peace church, had lost this position, and are in some quarters seeking to revive it. According to Dempster, the record is not quite what I had heard. He does report that in 1917 the denominational General Council took a position against participation in warfare, a position that was changed in

1967 “from one of pacifism to a position that enshrined ‘the principal of individual freedom of conscience as it relates to military service’” (138).

He cites evidence to show that the Assemblies had advocates for peace, “but at the practical level pacifism was a controversial position among the Assemblies of God denominational officials and pastors, at times even generating a divisive spirit” (142). So the Assemblies evidently did not succeed in developing a tradition of peace as a denominational position.

In the end, the consultation wrote a report with 26 points. Among those of interest are “17.D) Understanding of church and state continued to be matters of concern” and “18.E) Peacemaking would be furthered considerably if at least Christians could agree not to kill each other” (225). It is sadly ironic that even this cannot be agreed upon by the average church member. I am reminded of a report from World War I when German soldiers had *Gott mit uns* (God with us) on their helmets and some British soldiers responded, “We got mittens too.”

Mennonites have a peace tradition. How to practice and pass it on is a continuing challenge, as implied by Huebner’s title, *An Uneasy Peace*. But it is worth remembering that in World War II some fought fires instead of people.

—Daniel Hertzler, *Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, reports that he has written for peace or against war in his monthly column for the Connellsville (Pa.) Daily Courier. A column on global warming was one of the few rejected.*

## Resilience

All summer long barn swallows carry mud from the creek to fashion nests built high in the peak of my barn. Once their eggs hatch they burst onto the scene, tumbling out the spirit holes cut in its gables with the death-defying bravado of star performers in a circus high wire act. They sail back and forth, dip down and rise up, turn beak over swallow tail. I marvel at their impossible acrobatics as they go about the vital business of raising their young.

These fine, fall mornings they congregate in long lines on the utility wires that run parallel to the county line road that fronts my house. They chatter away, discussing whether it’s time for them to go, each passing its consensus on to the next. Once all agree, they fly off and regroup only to lapse into long, meaningful silences. This happens just before the purple field asters and goldenrod burst into bloom each September, as if their leave-taking anticipates the flowers’ annual appearance.

A year ago, I thought I’d lost them. The same week their young fledged, a tornado flattened my barn, scooping up both fledglings and parents, and hurling them into a merciless, black void. But I rebuilt and by next spring the farmers’ trusted bellwether had returned to take up residence under my new pine eaves. So small, so fragile, how had they survived? Where had the storm blown them? What force drew them back? With astounding resilience life’s smallest had stepped in to fill a need.

—After two decades of college teaching and bicoastal, urban living, W. N. Richardson, *Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, retired his Ph.D., reclaimed lost rural roots, and moved to Pennsylvania.*



## Read *DreamSeeker Magazine*

linking readers and authors interested in attending to “voices from the soul.”

*Subscriptions billed for issues left in calendar year (we publish quarterly) at \$3.75/issue. Suppose you subscribe midyear: we'll bill \$7.50 for two issues.*

*Subscriptions renew each January at \$14.95 (\$15.85 PA residents) for coming year, but you may cancel any time. (Can. pay in US funds \$5.00/issue, \$20/year, or contact us to pay by VISA/MC. Other countries ask.)*

*Contact options:* • send form to 126 Klingerman Road, Telford, PA 18969 • 1-215-723-9125  
• DSM@cascadiapublishinghouse.com

Or explore DSM free at [www.CascadiaPublishingHouse.com/dsm/](http://www.CascadiaPublishingHouse.com/dsm/)

Yes, I want to subscribe to DSM for (check one) myself \_\_\_ as described above or to give \_\_\_ to the person(s) named on separate sheet and will pay when billed.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

## Submissions to *DreamSeeker Magazine*

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 to accept numerous unsolicited articles, particularly once we make space for articles by regular columnists and those we solicit. However, we do want to publish some unsolicited writing, aim to treat all unsolicited submissions respectfully, and accept as many of them as we can. To submit, send queries or articles by e-mail to [DSM@CascadiaPublishingHouse.com](mailto:DSM@CascadiaPublishingHouse.com) or to the Telford address above. (Note that unsolicited articles submitted by mail without SASE are unlikely to be returned.)

Even as we can only publish a modest number of unsolicited articles, we do very much encourage feedback, including short letters for publication and occasional longer response articles (350-400 words).

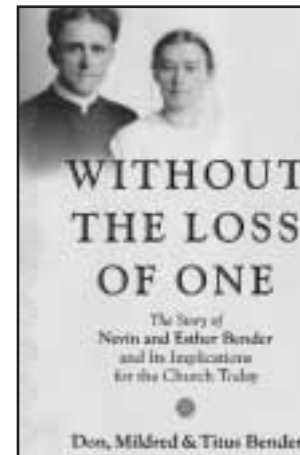
## New from DreamSeeker Books



### ***Touched by Grace:*** ***From Secrecy to New Life,*** Ann Showalter

“Ann’s honesty and courage in the face of her husband’s homosexuality and AIDS not only brought healing to Ray and to their family but shaped the future of her ministry as a Mennonite pastor,” says *Norma Sutton*. “In addition, this book offers the Mennonite church a new model for dealing with the homosexual persons in their midst.”

5.5 x 8.5” trade paper  
196 p, \$13.95 US/19.95 Can.  
Copublished with Herald Press.



### ***Without the Loss of One: The Story of*** ***Nevin and Esther Bender and Its*** ***Implications for the Church Today,***

Don, Mildred, and Titus Bender

“Here is a beautiful picture of unusual honesty and clarity, painted with words,” observes *Ruth. S. Weaver*. “The books that capture us reveal two things: moral fortitude in life’s painful, desert experiences, and the accompanying spiritual growth.”

5.5 x 8.5” trade paper  
276 p, \$15.95 US/20.95 Can.  
Copublished with Herald Press.

### **ORDER . . . From your local bookstore or**

• [contact@CascadiaPublishingHouse.com](mailto:contact@CascadiaPublishingHouse.com) • 1-215-723-9125 • 126 Klingerman Rd.; Telford PA 18969  
Shipping: best method \$3.95 1st book, \$1.00 each add. book (Can. \$4.95/\$1.50); PA res. 6% state tax



**DreamSeeker Books** is an imprint of Cascadia Publishing House

For more information and order options visit [www.CascadiaPublishingHouse.com](http://www.CascadiaPublishingHouse.com)

## New from Cascadia Publishing House

The new name of Pandora Press U.S.



### ***Nurturing Spirit Through Song: The Life of Mary K. Oyer***

ed. Rebecca Slough and  
Shirley Sprunger King

“Part biography, part history, part hagiography, part anthology, this book provides multiple prisms through which readers catch glimpses of Mary Oyer and her worlds. Stitching together contributions from a dozen writers and Oyer herself, the editors offer a global, informative patchwork.”

—Joe Springer

6 x 9" trade paper

300 p, \$22.95 US/29.95 Can.

Copublished with Herald Press.

### ***Colonial Germantown Mennonites***

Leonard Gross and Jan Gleysteen

“Colonial Philadelphia was a seedbed of American religious life. Here Quakers disdained military theocratic rule, German sectarians held that religious freedom could flourish only without a designated official religion, and denominational diversity had its beginning. This volume introduces the role of Germantown Mennonites in this formative epoch.”

—John A. Lapp

5.5 x 8.5" trade paper

80 p, \$12.95 US/14.95 Can.

Copublished with Herald Press.



### **ORDER . . . From your local bookstore or**

• [contact@CascadiaPublishingHouse.com](mailto:contact@CascadiaPublishingHouse.com) • 1-215-723-9125 • 126 Klingerman Rd.; Telford PA 18969

Shipping: best method \$3.95 1st book, \$1.00 each add. book (Can. \$4.95/\$1.50); PA res. 6% state tax



Seeking to value soul as much as sales

For more information and order options visit [www.CascadiaPublishingHouse.com](http://www.CascadiaPublishingHouse.com)

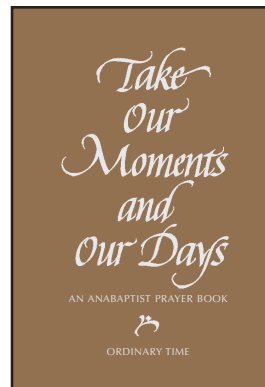
## New from Herald Press



### **Forgiveness: A Legacy of the West Nickel Mines Amish School**

John L. Ruth's sensitive and thoughtful meditation on the horrific events of October 2, 2006, reflects on the response of the Amish community of Nickel Mines, Lancaster County, Pa. Many were stunned when the Amish community offered words of forgiveness toward the dead killer and his family.

Paper, 152 pages, \$10.99



### **Take Our Moments and Our Days An Anabaptist Prayer Book: Ordinary Time**

“Praying with Scripture is a deep, sustained, and beloved tradition of the church. This book offers an inviting way to both enrich our daily prayer and open ourselves to the wisdom and renewing energy of our sacred texts, shaped and formed by these words taken to heart.”

—Marlene Kropf, Mennonite Church USA

Leatherette, 392 pages, \$22.99



### **The Mennonite Handbook**

Seriously accurate and seriously funny, here is an essential field guide for all things Mennonite. Combining reliable, historical, and theological information alongside some fun facts, *The Mennonite Handbook* provides practical tips on being a churchgoing follower of Jesus Christ.

Paper, 208 pages, \$15.99

1 800 245-7894 • [www.heraldpress.com](http://www.heraldpress.com)

 **Herald Press**  
A division of Mennonite Publishing Network  
Mennonite Church USA and  
Mennonite Church Canada

# New!



**Bible reading records**  
for children and youth  
and adults

**\$.95 US, \$1.19 Canada each**



**US: 1 800 245-7894**  
**Canada: 1 800 631-6535**  
**www.mph.org**



**Mennonite  
Publishing  
Network**

The publishing ministry of  
Mennonite Church USA and  
Mennonite Church Canada

## ***New from Cascadia Publishing House***

*The new name of Pandora Press U.S.*



***Wrestling with the Text:***  
***Young Adult Perspectives on Scripture***  
ed. Keith Graber Miller  
and Malinda Elizabeth Berry  
“This book presents the honest and  
sometimes raw reflections of young adults.  
Does Scripture matter? What authority  
does/should/can it hold in a post-ecclesial  
age? The writers share stories of how encoun-  
ters with Scripture have shaped their rela-  
tionships with family, friends, the  
church, and entire worldviews.”  
—*Regina Shands Stoltzfus*  
6 x 9” trade paper  
192 p, \$22.95 US/24.95 Can.  
Copublished with Herald Press.

## ***New from DreamSeeker Books***



***Where We Start***  
Poetry by Debra Gingerich  
“Gingerich knows  
“there is no  
perfect place / for anyone,”  
and it shows in her work.  
What she finds in the midst of  
this fallen world is, in her words,  
‘another kind of paradise.’ And through  
her lovely images and willful assertions,  
she offers more than ‘mere plums of informa-  
tion, / tasty juice splashed onto a page.’”  
—*Julia Kasdorf*  
5.5 x 8.5” trade paper  
90 p, \$12.95 US/18.95 Can.  
Copublished with Herald Press.

**ORDER . . . From your local bookstore or**

• [contact@CascadiaPublishingHouse.com](mailto:contact@CascadiaPublishingHouse.com) • 1-215-723-9125 • 126 Klingerman Rd.; Telford, PA 18969  
Shipping: best method \$3.95 1st book, \$1.00 each add. book (Can. \$4.95/\$1.50); PA res. 6% state tax



*Seeking to value soul as much as sales*

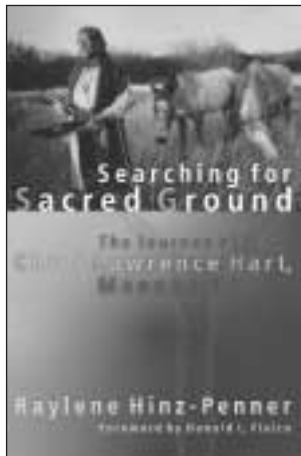
For more information and order options visit [www.CascadiaPublishingHouse.com](http://www.CascadiaPublishingHouse.com)



---

**New from Cascadia Publishing House**

*The new name of Pandora Press U.S.*



**Searching for Sacred Ground: The Journey of Chief Lawrence Hart, Mennonite**

Raylene Hinz-Penner

“Hinz-Penner seeks to preserve this extraordinary life story in the same way Hart preserves the stories, language, deeds, ways of doing justice, and even bones of his ancestors—by inscribing it into the narrative of her own life.”

—John Sheriff

6 x 9" trade paper

206 p, \$19.95 US/25.95 Can.

Copublished with Herald Press.



**Telling Our Stories: Personal Accounts of Engagement with Scripture**

ed. Ray Gingerich and Earl Zimmerman

“Like the vibrant voices of a mixed CD, this book blends the personal tales of nearly two dozen Mennonite pilgrims. The heart of the book contains 21 brief chapters, each describing, with candor and vulnerability, a unique spiritual journey with scripture.

Some of the voices on the CD seem dissonant, but together they challenge us to consider our own paradigm for biblical interpretation.”

—Steve Carpenter

6 x 9" trade paper

288 p, \$21.95 US/31.95 Can.

Copublished with Herald Press.

**ORDER . . . From your local bookstore or**

• contact@CascadiaPublishingHouse.com • 1-215-723-9125 • 126 Klingerman Rd.; Telford PA 18969  
Shipping: best method \$3.95 1st book, \$1.00 each add. book (Can. \$4.95/\$1.50); PA res. 6% state tax



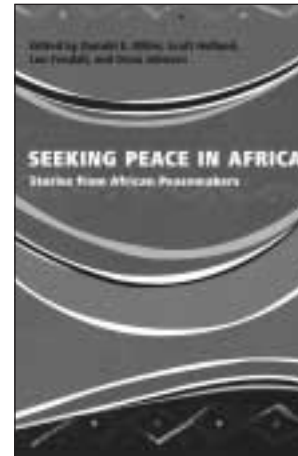
*Seeking to value soul as much as sales*

For more information and order options visit [www.CascadiaPublishingHouse.com](http://www.CascadiaPublishingHouse.com)

---

**New from Cascadia Publishing House**

*The new name of Pandora Press U.S.*



**Seeking Peace in Africa:**

**Stories from African Peacemakers**

ed. Donald E. Miller, Scott Holland,

Lon Fendall, and Dean Johnson

“The WCC . . . is very pleased to be part of this . . . theological consultation by the Historic Peace Churches. For the voices of Africans associated with the Historic Peace Churches to be . . . heard within the ecumenical context, it is important to create platforms such as this one. . . .”

—Samuel Kobia

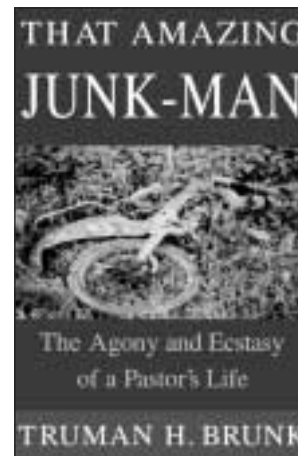
6 x 9" trade paper

248 p, \$22.95 US/29.95 Can.

Copublished with Herald Press.

---

**New from DreamSeeker Books**



**That Amazing Junk-Man:**

**The Agony and Ecstasy of a Pastor's Life**

Truman Brunk

“Brunk, storyteller extraordinaire, has finally committed some of his best to print. They come from his rich life as a builder of houses and more importantly as a builder of human beings. Some of his stories are part Garrison Keillor and part Mark Twain.”

—Gerald W Kaufman, L. Marlene Kaufman

5.5 x 8.5" trade paper

216 p, \$248.95 US/18.95 Can.

Copublished with Herald Press.

**ORDER . . . From your local bookstore or**

• contact@CascadiaPublishingHouse.com • 1-215-723-9125 • 126 Klingerman Rd.; Telford, PA 18969  
Shipping: best method \$3.95 1st book, \$1.00 each add. book (Can. \$4.95/\$1.50); PA res. 6% state tax



*Seeking to value soul as much as sales*

For more information and order options visit [www.CascadiaPublishingHouse.com](http://www.CascadiaPublishingHouse.com)



### *One Summer Day*

It is hot.  
Dry withered grasses lie flattened  
By blasts from a blazing furnace.  
Though separated by one hundred fifty million kilometers,  
One hundred ten degrees of fury  
Have dried out my mouth and nostrils.

I've been told that  
Only mad dogs and Englishmen would  
Wander outside on a midday such as this, but  
Here I am, neither a mad dog, nor an Englishman,  
Desperate for shade and drink.  
Only a nearly dried up  
Mud hole offers relief to me,  
And to the pig planted there.

Dying of dysentery,  
Even among friends, must be awful-  
But dying of thirst, alone and unseen in this barren land...  
The heat is so intense that even valiant  
Cicadas silence their shrill piercing songs,  
And birds seek shade in some other world.

Just when the temptation to join the pig in her wallow  
Becomes a conscious death wish within me,  
A sound other than wind whistling the grass  
Reaches my parched ears;  
A battered, struggling-to-breathe-jeep, gasps to a stop  
Beside me, and a friend reaches out his hand.

"Goin' my way?" he asks.  
"Of course, I was just about to start walking. . . ."  
"Well, then hop in," he says, opens the handle-less door  
From the inside, and clears a space on the sunken seat.  
With a chug and a shove and a grinding of gears  
We're off, but not before  
He offers the first of many bottles of water.

—*Jonathan Beachy, San Antonio, Texas, is a correctional health nurse. He delights in sharing hope (such as in this poem) and defying despair (such as in his other poem this issue, p. 2) in the belief that transformation by God's love is possible for all.*