

# **D**reamSeeker Magazine

Voices from the Soul



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Deborah Good

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*"The King's Speech": A Monarch finds his Voice*

Dave Greiser

***and much more***

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**Spring-Summer 2011**

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# Editorial: Transitioning on

As noted in my prior editorial (Winter 2011), this is a year of significant transition for *Dream-Seeker Magazine*, most notably the decision to focus on the digital version and suspend publication of the traditional paper version.

The effects on my schedule of losing both my parents in the past year while taking on and learning a new job as seminary dean have continued to make it hard for me to give *DSM* adequate time. In addition to contributing to format changes, schedule constraints have led to this merged Spring and Summer *DSM*. Although time will tell, my hope is to return to releasing subsequent issues on a more normal quarterly schedule.

*DSM* transitions will continue to unfold. Research into migrating a version of *DSM* to Kindle is underway (and has contributed to reformatting the *DSM* PDF version, available free online). Also, several columnists rightly see this transition period as a good one for column transitions. Thus Mark Wenger's and Renee Gehman's final columns are already behind them. Deborah Good's final col-

umn will be in *DSM* Autumn 2011. Their many contributions over years as *DSM* writers have been much appreciated (and remain fully available online). I also

remain grateful for the fresh writing of Brenda Hartman-Souder, still breaking in as *DSM*'s newest columnist.

Even as reader perspectives matter more than mine, I also think this *DSM* issue continues to demonstrate why

I see publishing it as a worthwhile labor of love. Katie Funk Wiebe, Joyce Peachey Lind, and I seek to share perspectives on parents and life shaped by losing them. Hartman-Souder then takes us into the mind of a parent fearing for and cherishing her children.

Deborah Good, Dave Greiser, Alan Soffin, Cynthia Page, Dan Liechty, Dan Hertzler, Noël King, Jonathan Beachey, and Chris Longenecker range richly across expertise, finding voice, an atheist view of Anabaptism, tongue screws, response to bin Laden's death, Jonathan Edwards, Karl Rove, history rewriting itself, and more. They nurture me; I hope you experience that too.

—Michael A. King

**I think this *DSM* issue continues to demonstrate why I see publishing it as a worthwhile labor of love.**

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Michael A. King

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## *Body Broken*

Holding the box of wine  
(intending to pour it into the chalice)  
I am momentarily distracted—  
the contents gush out  
splattering recklessly where they will. . . .

Then, taking the coarse whole grain bread  
(ready to share it with my fellow inmates)  
I try to part it evenly—  
but it breaks raggedly  
scattering crumbs onto the dirty earthy floor. . . .

Oh Jesus, your broken body is scattered  
your blood colors the earth of our existence  
then seeping into the soil of our lives  
sprouts new life within us.

—Jonathan Beachy, *San Antonio, Texas (writing  
as prison chaplain)*



# The Commandment That Should Be Marked PG-13

Katie Funk Wiebe

*Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live  
long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.*

—Exodus 20:12

I am haunted by memories of my father. I can't let him go although he died more than two decades ago. Sue Miller wrote *The Story of My Father* to explain her parent's last difficult years to herself as he descended into Alzheimer's Disease and became lost to her.

I have started a book about my father, Jacob Funk, several times over the last decades and always hit a dead end. Why record the life of a simple man who left no legacy of money and lands, built no institutions, voiced no exceptional social vision or grasped unusual theological concepts? He only carried within himself a persistent hope for freedom of spirit, which hope eluded him as he became ever more depressed in his later years.

Like Miller, I struggle with voice in writing about my father. I am used to using the first person point of view and placing myself front and center: “This is my life, my gift to you. Take what you want.” How much of myself should or could I reveal in a story about another person intimately involved in mine? But this is his story, not mine.

In fiction writing, the main character always faces a hill to climb, a foe to vanquish. However, my writing about him would not be fiction but an attempt at truth. Few people escape struggles in life. Life is not always kind. What was my father’s main conflict? What dragons did he try to slay with his limited education and limited English language skills?

What happened at the end when the frail old man, smiling weakly when visitors saw him, and the person Mother lived with were two different persons? In old age he had become bitter and irritable. His clothes hung loosely on his once erect stalwart frame as he slumped in an easy chair in silence for hours at a time.

**What happened at the end when the frail old man, smiling weakly when visitors saw him, and the person Mother lived with were two different persons?**

There had been sense and meaning in his life for decades, even direction, until he drowned in the meaningless of undiagnosed depression. Or was it post-traumatic stress disorder? Without meaning, joy fades. In his lifetime, loss of joy was defined as “spiritual weakness.” Yet I am to honor him, states the fifth commandment.

As he lay dying in the hospital, a nurse had combed his naturally wavy hair straight back to keep it out of his eyes. When I entered his room, my eyes always immediately looked at his face in the bed. I wanted to shout, “No. That’s wrong! You’ve made my father into a different person.” I wanted to find a comb and change it to his usual style, over his brow. But I resisted the impulse. The nurse had remade my father with a few sweeps of a comb, yet now I am revising my father also as I think about his life through selected memory.

Mother carried the weight of responsibility for Dad in his later years. She became his faithful companion and ready servant. All their

married life, more than 66 years, he had carried the weight of economic responsibility; now that he was declining, physically and emotionally, it was her turn to carry a different burden.

Looking after him gave her purpose. She knew she could not die before him, for the only place he felt safe toward the end was in their tiny apartment—with her. Did they have a happy marriage? Open affection was not the norm in that transposed culture from Russia. I know they clung to one another in their old age.

Many images of my father come from photographs. I see him and Mother frozen in this pose or that expression. In one picture he, a young man of about twenty, is standing assured in front of several dozen medical workers also in white garb at a meal break during World War I near a Russian field hospital. That's the way I recall him best. Front and center, a few inches taller than his coworkers, looking steadfastly forward.

I have no candid shots of either Mother or Dad. To have a photo taken in those days, you stood still, very still, sometimes for a few minutes, face solemn, not moving a muscle.

Yet when I think of my storekeeper father in real life I see him in deliberate actions, quickly flourishing a feather duster over a display, checking the door, pulling the clock chain in the evening before bedtime, blowing out lamps. Always quickly, quickly. Nothing hesitantly. Now everything was hesitantly.

As my sister Anne and I sat beside him one morning during his final illness, a stroke, he roused from a coma briefly to attempt to tell us something about money in his pants pocket—to be sure to check them. His mumbled words came out distorted and weak. We understood only “pants” and “money.” We plied him gently with questions, but he became agitated when his drug-defogged mind sensed he wasn't getting through. We comforted him that we would find the money.

Later we went through pants and sweater pockets, but found nothing. What ancient memory of the Russian revolution prompted this concern?

He lacked an understanding of the self in the post-Freudian sense or what one could do to maintain good mental health. In the last, wearisome years with few stimulating experiences, memories of fail-

ures were crowding out memories of decisive forward action. In letters to me (I lived about 1500 miles away) he admitted to being lonely and wishing he had made better decisions in life. Now it was too late.

**Y**et he had made many good decisions once but had now lost sight of them. I easily recall times when he moved decisively, but was he afraid at the time, like I am sometimes afraid when I face something new?

As a young man of 18, a Mennonite conscientious objector to war, he enlisted in the Russian Red Cross as a medical orderly to be in the same unit with his older brother John instead of waiting for the government to conscript him. He told me how alone he felt in Moscow away from his home community for the first time. It took years of difficult duty before he was released from active duty.

During the war he separated himself from the church of his childhood, the Mennonite (*Kirchliche*) church, and found salvation and peace of mind in the Mennonite Brethren, a more evangelical body. This move meant a widening gulf between himself and the rest of his family, who remained with the traditional church. They couldn't understand his desperate hunger for inner peace.

He knew that the "Brethren" were looked down upon by members of the traditional church. He was baptized by immersion in the Dnieper River. His mother recorded it in her genealogy. How had his siblings and parents actually received this bold move? How difficult had that passage to spiritual freedom been?

He made a major life change when he and Mother and my two older sisters migrated to Canada from the Ukraine in 1923 with only 25 cents in his pocket to begin anew. Women never carried money.

Place determines your understanding of yourself, but what if that place changes radically? What changes take place in your being alongside change in domicile? He had "Russian blood" flowing in his Mennonite veins. He resonated with Russian music, language, folkways. Russia was his home.

Moving from one place to another in the same country brings upheavals, but to pick up a few possessions, like a samovar, a tin cradle, and some small photos, to migrate to a new land where everything is new—language, customs, weather, people—is a violent change. My parents were leaving behind the country that had nurtured them

from birth but deserted them with the entrance of a new Bolshevik political regime.

Sometime during the gut-wrenching upheaval of the Russian revolution, which threw social, political, and religious life into indescribable turmoil, his father, grandparents, and an uncle died within two weeks due to widespread famine and typhus. As the oldest son at home, he buried them single-handedly during a time of extreme dearth of lumber, tools to dig a grave, even a religious leader to pray over the dead.

Somehow during this time he forgave a younger brother for having nearly caused his death by joining the White Army, incurring the wrath of the Red Bolshevik army. Dad's account of near-death by firing squad was difficult to share with us children. This and other gruesome war stories were pushed deep down into his consciousness, only a few escaping occasionally in an unexpected moment.

When he finally told my brother Jack the story of being crowded with other prisoners in a small cellar room, he alluded only briefly to the reason for his imprisonment. How much more difficult was that process of forgiving?

In Canada, at some point, though he had been an itinerant ordained deacon-evangelist in Russia, he sidestepped that calling to become a lay minister alongside his work as a storekeeper to keep his family warm and fed. How much did he agonize over that decision? Now I wish I had asked him more questions when he was alive.

Somehow my father conveyed to me the importance of raging against injustice, even if silently, but without rancor. I recognize he divided the world into black and white with few shades of gray and couldn't see that though he rebelled against tradition, he also fought for it, but his heart was always forgiving toward all.

At what point did he turn from a man living in hope to a man living in the bitter memories of the past? But why did he see his long eventful life as failure and not as growth? Was it physical illness? Spiritual weakness?

**W**e can neither destroy nor escape the past, cultural or personal. Today I look back on a Funk family history because he and Mother made decisions, stumbled, and moved on, sometimes forward. The

fifth commandment admonishes us to “Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.”

The generation gap of the 1960s spawned college students who denied they had parents, so deans couldn’t check back with them. They marked their parents as deceased on application forms. They said, “We want nothing to do with our parents. We don’t want their lifestyle or goals—because they are phony, hypocritical. We don’t like their love of affluence and security.” They declared boldly that parents weren’t worth honoring or obeying.

**I maintain this commandment was not directed primarily to children, especially young children.**

Some parents are admittedly no models of love, courage, zest for living and a spirit of forgiveness. Children are deserted, abused, and neglected—considered a pollutant in carefree, child-free adult living. So, for some offspring, this commandment is a cruel joke, hardly something to uphold. That’s one side of the picture.

I maintain this commandment was not directed primarily to children, especially young children. When we push it onto children, we miss its real meaning.

I remember intoning the Ten Commandments to earn a wall motto or New Testament in vacation Bible school. Parents hoped children would recall these words at the appropriate time and change behavior.

But the commandment should have PG-13 boldly written before it. Although Jewish children memorized it before the other nine, it was intended for adults. The other nine commandments are clearly directed to adults: Don’t covet your neighbor’s wife. Don’t work on the Sabbath. Don’t murder, steal, or give false testimony. When the rich young ruler, an adult, came to Jesus for advice on gaining eternal life, he was told to honor his father and mother.

This does not mean that children should not obey and honor their parents, but there is more here, much more. The commandment se-

lects parents out of different relational groups to be honored. A parent-child relationship is one that can never be altered. A father or mother is always a parent, even if the child is given away at birth, abused, abducted, lost during a divorce, murdered or dies a natural death. Once you have given birth to children, you can't undo this. Modern DNA evidence proves heredity.

Parents are not to be honored for biological reasons. Decades ago on Mother's Day, a bouquet was given to the producer of the most offspring. I shuddered when the recipient went to the front to claim her bouquet to the sound of applause, thinking we honor cows for regular production, surely not mothers.

Yet childbearing, frequent or infrequent, should not be dismissed lightly. It is not always a choice. Mothers who accept the task of motherhood gladly, whether natural or adoptive, are to be praised.

As I study family histories, I find that some women had 12 to 15 or more pregnancies in times of revolution, famine, migration, and drought. Childbirth often brought a mother to brink of death. Even in good times bearing and raising few or many children is not a trivial pursuit. Let's recognize parents for their courage and love, not ability to reproduce.

We do not honor parents for their reputation for righteousness, wealth, success, beauty, or the sacrifices they made in parenting. We don't honor parents by adopting their value system or because they left us a huge legacy of houses and lands. Some parents have big reputations and estates, some none.

Some children blame parents for their own hardships and failures in life at marriage, child-rearing, career-building, but take credit for their own successes. I believe we are each responsible for our own decisions and how we have taken advantage of opportunities.

**R**abbi Abram Heschel states that the real bond between two generations is not a blood relationship but the "insights they share, the appreciation they have in common, the moment of inner experience in which they meet." We honor parents, biological or adoptive, by recognizing this special bond lost when families break up for any reason.

Madeleine L'Engle in *The Year of the Great Grandmother* writes about her mother, suffering from dementia. She is able to care lov-

ingly for her mother—irritable, cross, demanding—because she remembers the high moments they shared together when her parent was well. Illness broke the bond but she continued to honor her ailing parent.

Here's the gist of the issue: We honor parents because the family, regardless of the way it is structured, is a special bond in God's economy. It is not just an economic unit for income tax purposes or to make life easier: One parent does the laundry and cooking, the other makes the money or vice versa. God is telling us in this commandment that there is something special in the family, something we have lost sight of in our furor for self-realization.

In Hebrew, "honor" means more than simple respect. It means more than offering a little sentiment with a birthday card, "I love you, Mother and Dad" and a phone call at Christmas. The commandment asks children to acknowledge the burden of their parents seriously.

Do not confuse them with God. Do not obey them as one would a god. Give God his rightful place as Lord over all. Honor parents as human beings, but not as little gods. We do not call God "father" because he resembles an earthly father. The Greeks fashioned gods in their image, turning them into capricious beings. To honor means to recognize that parents are one way that the glory and mystery of God is conveyed to the next generation.

That is the burden of parents.

**T**he key to understanding this commandment is in the phrase often omitted: "so shall you live long in the land the Lord your God has given you." I have seldom heard preachers explain it. This commandment was the first one with a promise. In early biblical times God promised Abraham a land which his descendents would own and live in for centuries. If they honored their parents, this land would always be theirs.

Abraham had lived in that promised land and raised a son there, Jacob, who had twelve sons of his own. Then one day ten brothers in this family sold the eleventh brother, Joseph, to the Egyptians. They put a selfish concern ahead of their love for their brother—and the result was they eventually lost the land. They broke the family bond. As slaves in Egypt they lost their sense of identity and self-worth.

When Moses received the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai on the way back to the Promised land, God was warning the Israelites: Honor your father and mother or you will lose the land again. Respect for family members and love for land is closely related. If you love the land too much, people lose their value, and you lose both land and people. If you love and respect your family, you will retain land and life.

A Hebrew father at the Passover feast, established at this time, pointed his children not to himself but to the fathers—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and beyond that to the Father of all fathers, God of all. When this happens all generations are pointed in the same direction—toward God. We honor parents when we recognize that they have been intrusted with a burden—to point the next generation toward God, the father-mother of us all. They stand in God’s place before their children.

**D**oes this commandment mean that children who honor parents will always own houses and fields? Hardly.

Walter Brueggeman has done a masterful study of the relationship of the Israelites and the land in *The Land*. He points out that “land” in the Old Testament has both a literal and symbolic meaning. It may mean actual turf that can be tilled, but it also means having a place, of being rooted, of not being homeless wanderers, exiles, sojourners.

Brueggeman defines land as space where important words are spoken that establish identity, define vocation and envision destiny. In this space, vows are exchanged, promises made, and demands issued. When the person with power forgets brothers and sisters, not only do they suffer as does the one who “lifted his heart over them” like the brothers of Joseph. In a home where the members value the family bond, the child, young or old, will have a sense of rootedness, of place, of firmness in life, of a place to speak important words, to form an identity, and to learn to care and share.

Family, however it is configured, is God’s arrangement for human beings, God’s method of continuing the relationship with our creator and with one another—a place where we learn about interdependence, sharing, and caring. Compassion and caring have their roots in the family and are learned when family burdens get heavy.

A family does not begin with a marriage certificate, range, frig, a mattress on the floor, or even just the decision to live together. Family begins with the parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. Family is part of a deeply flowing river.

A “placed,” not necessarily “landed” family, brings with it the strength of stability of relationships and satisfies a human hunger for identity. Homeless refugees, illegal aliens, wandering from place to place, do not make history.

My parents gave me a history I can share with the next generation: the windmill on the hill in the Ukraine and the events that took place there, how my father found my mother’s family lost during the Russian revolution, and their longing to be restored to a place in the family and community. That history has high moments and low ones.

**S**o I keep writing my father’s story of his life with Mother to honor them. They met, married, had children, experienced good and bad events, struggled onward, stumbled backward.

I recognize them in myself, their patterns of dealing with life, gestures, and physical traits. I honor them when I release them of all my grudges, hostilities, criticisms, about mistakes made in raising me. “We honor our parents for what they are and forgive them for what they are not,” someone has said. Amen. I honor my parents for what they were and forgive them for what they were not as I hope my children will do the same for me.

So here I lay a wreath of honor at the base of the tree where your ashes are buried, Dad and Mother. Through your life you gave me a rootedness, a strength, a place to stand. I will keep writing about your lives.

—*Katie Funk Wiebe, Wichita, Kansas, author of many books and articles, continues to examine her life. Among her most recent books is You Never Gave Me a Name (DreamSeeker Books, 2009).*



# Mom's Birthday

Joyce Peachey Lind

**M**y mother's birthday was in April. If she were still living she would have turned 82 this year. She died over ten years ago, but of course I always think of her on her birthday.

I didn't know my grandmother, who died when I was a baby. I remember asking, when I was a child, if my mother remembered Grandma. My mom could describe her, tell about her, remember her vividly, and I wondered how she could do that, when her mother had been dead for such a long time.

Now I know. When I think about my mother, sometimes it is like seeing snapshots in my mind, real ones and imagined ones. Other times I hear her laugh, see her expressions, remember her gestures, and watch her like I'm watching a movie.

In my mind I see her walking down the lane to get the mail, at the farm where I was born and where my parents retired. I see her working in the garden, lovingly tending the flowers she and my dad planted everywhere. I see her standing at the

kitchen counter, looking over her list of things to do for the day, reading her Bible as she sits at the dining room table, praying for her children, shedding tears as she prays for them and the struggles they are going through. I hear my mother singing and laughing with her sisters, giggling at a joke, gently reading to her grandchildren.

My sister and I laughed when we went through my mother's purse after she died. Mom's purses, stylish but practical, always contained the same things over the years—Tic Tacs or mints, a wallet with a coin purse, a small white Bible she carried at her wedding, a cloth hanky, a nail file, a comb, and always, always, several crumpled tissues.

I'm pretty sure the tissues were new, unused, but as a child when I was in church and needed to blow my nose, I was horrified to receive a crumpled tissue from the bottom of mom's purse. If necessity warranted its use, it smelled minty, and I was never really sure if it had been used for a quick wipe and then returned, or if it had simply been lying dormant, waiting for a first use.

Several months after her death we looked through her purse, and sure enough, there were the crumpled tissues. Again we laughed as we clung to them, squeezed them, and finally tossed them.

**T**hough she died so long ago, in a moment I am at her side, in the hospital emergency room with my father, my brother, and my aunt. We hover around her, glancing anxiously at each other.

Despite her cancer diagnosis, her treatment had been making her feel better, she was recovering it seemed, and we were optimistic that she would live several more weeks, perhaps months. But suddenly in the middle of the night she couldn't breathe easily, and my husband drove the four miles out and back on icy roads to take her with my father to the ER.

**We listen to her labored breathing; I look at her lying on the white hospital table with a cap on to warm her. Her eyes are closed.**

We listen to her labored breathing; I look at her lying on the white hospital table with a cap on to warm her. Her eyes are closed. When

my father asks the doctor—who has been called into the emergency room on an icy, treacherous night—what is happening, the doctor says in a monotone voice that I still resent, “You know she’s dying.” My aunt, a nurse, quietly shows me my mother’s bluish fingernails.

I don’t fully understand until several minutes later, when we see her go, and we call out to her as if she can hear us, as if she can hold on just a few moments longer so we can say good-bye.

**D**eath is powerful. It separates, darkens, and alienates. There is nothing that I have experienced that has left me so empty, that has stated finality so clearly as watching my mother die.

My faith, nurtured by years of Sunday school, comforted me in the days following my mother’s death. The words from the hymn “My Life Flows On in Endless Song” became a source of strength as I imagined clinging to God the rock and keeping my “inmost calm” despite the storm.

Weeks and months later, however, I railed against God, inwardly kicking and screaming at the injustice of mortality and the pain and separation that it brings. As I mourned the loss of my mother I found I was distancing myself from those Sunday school teachings, and questioning the certainty of life after death.

Recently renowned physicist Stephen Hawking announced his belief that “there is no heaven or afterlife . . . it is a fairy story for people afraid of the dark.” I was drawn to articles about him, curious to know what “proof” this scientist had that would cause him to make that declaration. But as I read his interview, I wondered how anyone could really know—with certainty—that there *isn’t* life after death?

I often stand somewhere in between—not always committed to a belief in a heaven where St. Peter stands at the gate and angels in shiny white robes beckon us with harmonious singing. And yet not able to say with conviction that there cannot be anything else beyond this life.

In the past couple of years I have come to believe more deeply in the possibility of a joyous reunion, a time when death no longer separates. Despite Sunday school teachings that tell me that we will be with God in a place called heaven, I am not absolutely sure what that means. I hope it means I will again be with my mother and others that

I love. I hope it means that we join spirits and find an existence with God in a way that is joyful beyond our wildest dreams. But the certainty piece is something I continue to wrestle with.

Perhaps our memories of loved ones who have died give us a glimpse of what it means to live in hope for God's ability to overcome the separation of death. The memories I have of my mother are not the same as seeing her and being with her. But as I remember her I know that she was real. As I hold on to the parts of her that I have—a purse, crumpled tissues, photos, memories—a part of her remains.

As Easter arrived this year, the flowers that my mother planted were blooming, a reminder of her cheerful spirit and her love of nature's beauty. For me they also represent the hope that death is not the end. Despite darkness and separation there is a possibility for new life and holy reunions beyond our imaginings.

*—Joyce Peachey Lind lives with her husband and two children in Harrisonburg, Virginia. She enjoys hearing about the world from the perspective of her first grade students.*



## Pop's Encore

Michael A. King

**P**op's encore was set in motion as my mother Betty Detweiler King was dying in September 2010. Breaking his hip in February had left my dad Aaron's mind fogged-in. Alzheimers? Lingering post-hospital psychosis? We were never sure. We just knew that we, along with millions more, were facing that slice-through-the-heart feeling of seeing now in second childhood a parent who once symbolized the very essence of strong and adult.

The first time he wanted me to cut his hair I thought I just couldn't. It was too stark a symbol of our role reversal. I wanted him to take care of me, to be my shield against life's dangers. To cut his hair was to take care of him.

But I cut his hair. Then and later. And how far I realized we had journeyed together when on the last day I saw him alive he wanted to be sure his hair was combed. Someone offered me a comb; I said "No, this time I want to use my own comb." I was tempted to seal it in glass but put it back in

my pocket grateful to think of my dad's DNA blending on it with my own.

And between the first hair-cutting and the final combing did come Pop's encore. As my mother was dying, I doubted we should get Pop to the hospital. I thought it would be too intense—it would hurt so much but he wouldn't know why. My sister Jewel was unhesitating: He needed to be there. She was right. He found tears and words to say goodbye to the woman he was able to name one last time the love of his life.

**Earlier last year I thought Aaron M. King had pretty much given the fathering he had to give. Yet his encore transformed much of what had gone before.**

Then, and who can say precisely how it came to be, he kept back in skilled nursing care the ability to name he had regained in the hospital. Genesis tells of God giving humans the ability to name what is. What a power. What a loss when it flees us. What a miracle when we recover it, as he did—able once more look into my eyes and name me “Michael” and into the eyes of all his children, grandchildren, and friends, and name us all.

But he had regained even the ability to name his relationships with us, his love for us, his wisdoms if anything too rarely uttered while our mother was alive. For three months he poured himself into reaching back across his 88 years to our births, to our childhoods and adult-hoods, to the life shared with friends, such as beloved members and spouses of the Crusaders Quartet (Aaron and Betty, Roy and Florence Kreider, Eugene and Alice Souder, Paul and Bertha Swarr). He'd give us, as one of my brothers put it, that “piercing blue gaze,” and we'd know either some insight to treasure was brewing or that the blue gaze itself was this time the gem.

One treasure was his renewed ability to track that I had become a seminary dean. He first learned I was a candidate before he broke his hip, and all he managed to do was worry (as did I, actually) that the job was too big. Then he lost ability even to understand what a job was. But during his encore I prayed with him one night, prayed that

God would be the strength making perfect his deepening weakness, and as I moved to the amen I heard his halting voice start up. He prayed, “And God, give Michael your strength to do his job.”

That was for me a big moment in Pop’s encore. But that small matter of hair and comb also kept turning big. His combs kept vanishing. That care for hair which had become a sign of the dignity increasingly hard to come by would be blocked by a missing piece of plastic. For weeks I’d visit and forget to bring the new combs I kept promising. Finally I did it; I managed to buy not only one comb but three—one for the top of his dresser, one to be a spare in the drawer, and one I kept in my car just in case. We both had a sense that day, combs everywhere, that life had taken a fine turn indeed.

I could tell of all the ways he blessed countless more, but those are their stories, so let me just say this yet: The power of those three months stuns me. Earlier last year I thought Aaron M. King had pretty much given the fathering he had to give. Yet his encore transformed much of what had gone before. He died January 3, 2011, having taught this final father’s lesson: No matter our health or life stage, we can give each other amazing blessings to the end.

—*Michael A. King, Telford, Pennsylvania and Harrisonburg, Virginia, is Dean, Eastern Mennonite Seminary; and publisher, Cascadia Publishing House LLC. This reflection was first published in The Mennonite (February 2011), as a “Real Families” column.*



## At Night (Presently in Nigeria)

Brenda Hartman-Souder

**A**t night I steal into their rooms, my bare feet silent on the cool cement floor. The threadbare cotton curtains dance from a breeze that loves louvered windows. The kids prefer their curtains partly open at night; the outside security bulbs bathe the room in warm light if there's electricity or a cool, metallic sheen if we resort to the fluorescent back-up system. Security is a big deal here.

All day long, it seems, they bicker, tease, and drive each other to little acts of antagonism poking perfect jabs jabs that up the ante, prolong the provocation. Greg knows just how to “accidentally” bump Val with his backpack; she's skilled at reminding him of his lowly eight-year-old status while she, at 12, participates in middle school privileges like intramural sports and sleepovers.

At night, however, they snuggle in their beds and take comfort in their common lot—here with their parents in Nigeria. Mark and I kiss them goodnight and as we leave their rooms,

Greg begins his routine, strikingly similar to the *Waltons*, a show he's never seen.

“Good night, Val.”

“Night, Greg.”

“Good night, Dad”

“Good night, (I) love you son.”

“Night, Mom”

“Goodnight sweetheart.”

During the day they're anything but still, but underneath gauzy mosquito nets, they sleep and dream, steadily breathing, motionless now among tousled sheets, innocent.

Watching them at night, I can barely breathe. It's here as I briefly stand guard that my love for them most swiftly and powerfully rises and swirls through me and I know how easily I would be taken down if anything happens to them.

**Watching them at night, I can barely breathe.  
It's here as I briefly stand guard that my love  
for them most swiftly and powerfully rises and  
swirls through me. . . .**

I sleep much less well than my children. My mind veers down the same road many nights—the path of possible disasters that could destroy our quiet, yet fragile household peace—armed robbery, road death, illness, and political or ethno-religious upheaval. Nigeria feels dangerous in a way that still jars me after four years. There's a sense that no one is looking out for the citizens.

Few state governments regularly repairs all roads, or enforce decent speed, or keep clunker cars off the highway. How many times do we need to hear that brakes failed or a wheel came off to spin a vehicle into oncoming traffic?

Comprehensive health care is unknown here; preventive health checkups are rare, and people tend to self-treat or listen to and buy medicine from the local pharmacist, whose advice is free, but whose misdiagnosis often wastes precious time on killer diseases like malaria and typhoid. Drugs are unregulated; labs produce erroneous results.

And a string of conflicts, killings, and terror that rotates through towns, mutating to new hot spots, then coming back to haunt places where unrest, distrust, rage, and hopelessness already lurk are proving challenging for the government to end.

Our kids hear and know of the risks; we could scarcely keep such realities from them. But school, friends, play, and the tasks of growing consume them as those things should. And at night, they easily surrender to exhaustion well-earned when minds and bodies play hard. And Nigeria, their home for now, suits them.

*I*t's me who prowls the house, harboring obsessions, asking questions. Will our agreeing to come and work here make any sense if one of them perishes? Isn't living here just craziness anyway? Can I continue to endure the risk? How can I protect them? Would the spirit of God call us here and then allow disaster? There are no answers, I think.

Parents all over the world must ask these kind of questions over and over. Parents without money to take a sick child to the clinic. Parents on the move to to balance successful careers and the demands of raising children. Parents languishing in refugee camps. Parents facing bullets, real ones in ghettos or bullets of unemployment, loss of health insurance or illness. Parents whose substantial salaries afford the best schools and neighborhoods. Parents exhausted from the strain of working multiple jobs just to buy the peanut butter and second-hand clothes. To be a parent is to experience fathomless depths of both love and fear.

My fears did not begin in Nigeria; they burned brightly in relatively safe and sleepy Syracuse, New York. In 2004, while living there in a cozy bungalow on a neat little street, where I also stole into my children's rooms at night. I wrote:

When I became a parent, life became more vivid. The joys became more pronounced as did (awareness) of dangers. . . . I see terror lurking at every turn. A run into the street as a car accelerates. An illness without a cure. The broken heart from being teased, rejected. Inability to soothe oneself, modulate strong emotions. A biological turn into mania or depression. I look at

my two children at night as they are sleeping, and I am breathless, suspended with disbelief at the gifts I have been given, speechless with the terror of losing one of them in some way, any way.

As a parent, I can only plead with God and try to infuse my heart with the knowledge that life everywhere carries no promises, all things end, cycles are continuous, today is precious, somehow we survive and emerge, most of the time, from disaster or tragedy. That the Spirit led us here against conventional wisdom, but holds us here too. That I am loved but not entitled to any special promises or privileges, that we mitigate the risks as best we can for the benefits—relationships, flexible and challenging work, shared parenting, lots of family time—that bless us daily, that Nigeria mostly suits me too.

And I continue to watch them, awake or asleep, and marvel at their lives, their energy, their love, their trust, the fullness of life upon them now despite what tomorrow or even this night holds.

—*Brenda Hartman-Souder, Jos, Nigeria, serves as co-representative of Mennonite Central Committee Nigeria and, along with spouse Mark, as parent of Valerie and Greg.*



## More Than One Kind of Expert

Deborah Good

**I** work in the world of urban public education—not as a teacher nor as a principal but as a researcher, advocate, and occasional activist. I get into a variety of schools, interview folks, and analyze data. I discuss, read, write, present, and generally try to keep up with the “discourse.” This has recently caused two somewhat incompatible thoughts to chase one another around my head.

Thought number one: Receiving a formal education is hugely important to one’s chances at success and, in some cases, survival as an adult. We should therefore make every possible effort to increase high school graduation and college-going rates nationwide. Dropout prevention programs and reform of our failing educational systems must be a priority, particularly in our most beaten down, disadvantaged communities.

And thought number two: The prestige and merit consistently doled out for a formal educa-

tion over other forms of expertise is, as my dad would say, a big pile of manure.

Let me explain.

Statistically, the benefits of a formal education are inarguable. Research has shown that students who do not graduate from high school are more likely than others to face joblessness, single motherhood, and incarceration. According to a recent U.S. Census report, the income differences are also significant. Those with (just) a high school diploma or equivalent make, on average, 35 percent more than those without. Add an Associate degree, a Bachelor's degree, etcetera, etcetera, and the average income climbs with each additional piece of paper.

Moreover, the disparity between the paychecks of society's "educated" and "uneducated" has grown increasingly large in the past

**In Philadelphia, where I live, the mayor often raises alarm over the fact that only about 60 percent of public high school students graduate within six years of entering as freshmen. . . .**

twenty years. (The difference has more than doubled since 1980.)

In Philadelphia, where I live, the mayor often raises alarm over the fact that only about 60 percent of public high school students graduate within six years of entering as freshmen—a problem often referred to as the “dropout crisis.” A group of young people I have been working with prefer to call it a “pushout crisis.”

While the word *dropout* implies that the roots of the problem lie with students, *pushout* places responsibility on our schools and school districts, pointing to the ways that they have failed to meet our students' needs. School systems push students out directly through punitive disciplinary policies and indirectly through their failure to provide adequate supports and a safe learning environment.

Carla (names changed), for example, warm, enthusiastic, and capable of discussing social inequities and the politics of Malcolm X, left school because she did not have adults standing up for her when she was regularly picked on by other kids.

And Brian, with his emotional resilience and sense of humor, says he has often felt stereotyped by school staff for how he looks and dresses. He has been in and out of schools and programs ever since he was young, often getting in trouble—and sometimes kicked out—for behavior issues.

**B**rian, Carla, and the other young people I have been working with are all Philadelphia school district “dropouts.” Many have re-engaged in alternative schools and GED programs. They are also members of a youth organizing group in Philadelphia called Youth United for Change or YUC ([www.youthunitedforchange.org](http://www.youthunitedforchange.org)). Together they form YUC’s Pushout Chapter.

**I am convinced that most of what got me through . . . school . . . was my willingness to sit quietly and follow the rules. . . .**

With training and guidance from an adult organizer and two researchers—including myself—the Pushout Chapter has been conducting original research on the causes of Philadelphia’s pushout crisis. This is a participatory action research (look that up!) project. While none of them succeeded in the traditional high schools they attended and left, the young people in the chapter have brought a real-life expertise to our project that I, and my recently acquired Master’s degree, could not.

Our definition of expertise needs broadening.

I do not mean that we should no longer require a medical school education to become a doctor. I mean only that there is more than one way to be educated. My grandpa—Dad’s dad—was a Lancaster County dairy farmer with an eighth-grade education who understood that wisdom and expertise can come with living. My grandpa survived tough economic times, farmed long days, and raised seven boys—all of whom, unlike their father, later pursued formal degrees.

I am convinced that most of what got me through elementary, middle, and high school with good grades and honors was my willingness to sit quietly and follow the rules, my test-taking skills, and

my desire to please the adults in my life, consistently reinforced by their affirmation when I did so.

Because of all the adult support in my life, because I did well on tests, and because I learned to do what teachers wanted of me, I was assumed to be bright, graduated with a strong GPA, and was offered a nice scholarship when I went on to college. I had climbed to the top of a “good student” hierarchy that had more to do with conformity than intelligence.

Unfortunately, the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 further narrows definitions of smarts and success. NCLB’s emphasis on greater accountability—for teachers, schools, and school districts—is a good thing. The over-reliance on test scores as a measure of student achievement, however, severely limits the way we think about teaching, learning, and intelligence. It has ultimately changed what happens in classrooms and not always for the best.

My adeptness at conforming to the structures and expectations of a traditional public school education allowed me to cultivate skills that have served me well in my job life as an adult: putting in hours on my work, maintaining an even temper, and making quick appraisals of what must be done to please those in authority.

It is worth asking, however, why it is *these skills* that are so often privileged by our educational systems over a plethora of other skills that working people and active citizens put to use every day. I’m thinking here of the ability to relate to people of all stripes, artistic creativity, physical strength and dexterity, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and even the courage to disrupt societal norms in the name of greater justice. These competencies are not what state standardized tests are asking of our students.

**I** wish two things at once. I wish desperately for the kids whose lives seem dead-ended in some of Philly’s roughest neighborhoods to find a way out. And achieving a formal education is one of the surest ways out. But at the same time, I want to turn the world upside down. I want a world where we recognize that our eighth-grade-educated farmers and high school “pushouts” have intelligence and expertise unrecognized by formal degrees. I want a flattening of constructed hierarchies and a celebration of our diverse intelligences and skills.

Sometimes what I want is so simple, it is hard to even say: space enough for everyone to bring to the table their assorted bundles of gifts and quirks, share what they've got, and be esteemed highly for it.

—*Deborah Good, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, is a senior research assistant at Research for Action ([www.researchforaction.org](http://www.researchforaction.org)) and author, with Nelson Good, of Long After I'm Gone: A Father-Daughter Memoir (DreamSeeker Books/Cascadia, 2009). She can be reached at [deborahagood@gmail.com](mailto:deborahagood@gmail.com). Pushed Out: Youth Voices on the Dropout Crisis in Philadelphia, a report released by YUC earlier this year, can be found at [youthunitedforchange.org](http://youthunitedforchange.org).*



# “The King’s Speech”

*A Monarch Finds his Voice*

## Dave Greiser

**M**ost anyone who speaks publicly for a living is familiar with the clammy anxiety of those last seconds before addressing an audience. Politicians, preachers, and actors all know that the real possibility of failure accompanies each lonely trip to the microphone.

But what if someone were forced to speak before masses of people with a pronounced stammer? And what if the setting of one’s most important speech was a moment of international crisis, an occasion that required the projection of a confident resolve before millions of people? Such was the plight of King George VI when he addressed Britain to declare war on Germany in 1939. The king’s quandary, along with the events leading up to it, is rendered with remarkable depth and emotion in the film “The King’s Speech.”

The premise of this story does not suggest material for a great film. The prospect of watching

someone overcome a speech impediment will not send the average movie-goer running toward the box office. “The King’s Speech” was originally a play script discovered by the rising young London filmmaker Tom Hooper. In ordinary hands, this film might have become another wordy, slowly paced BBC costume drama. In Hopper’s hands it is a tightly paced story that builds toward surprisingly deep feeling.

**In ordinary hands, this film might have become another wordy, slowly paced BBC costume drama. In Hopper’s hands it is a tightly paced story that builds toward surprisingly deep feeling.**

Credit for much of this feeling must go to the actors, of course. Colin Firth (“A Single Man,” “Pride and Prejudice”) portrays George VI, formerly Prince Albert (“Bertie” to his family) as a retiring career naval officer whose last desire in the world is to become king.

Most Americans are somewhat familiar with the story of George’s flamboyant older brother Edward. Edward (played here by Guy Pearce) relinquished the throne in 1936 to marry a twice-divorced American. Up to now we have heard little about Edward’s successor, George VI, whose painful childhood included brow-beating from his royal father to “Just spit it out!” when George was unable to form his words. Firth’s stuttering in this role is more than a dramatic trick; when the king stammers before his subjects at a party, we feel his shame.

The man who wants to loosen George’s tongue and start him speaking plainly is an offbeat Australian named Lionel Logue. Logue is played by Geoffrey Rush (“Pirates of the Caribbean”) as an unorthodox therapist whose techniques include reading into a recording device while listening to loud music through headphones, and shouting obscenities—which apparently most stutterers can repeat fluently.

Rush renders Lionel Logue as a commoner who refuses to kowtow to class distinctions and insists instead on conducting his sessions

with the king on a first name basis. That Logue himself is a failed actor gives him a certain empathy with his terrified client.

Helena Bonham Carter is the third indispensable player in this film. Carter plays the king's wife (Americans know her as the "queen mum"). Though Carter began her dramatic career doing costume dramas like this one, most filmgoers identify her more readily in her quirkier roles as a witch ("Harry Potter") or an evil mortal ("Fight Club", and "Big Fish"). Carter plays this role with a nurturing softness that suggests she is an actor of great range and subtlety.

Many period movies rely on painstakingly constructed historical sets and key scenes that are elaborately produced on a grand scale. But some of the most memorable scenes in "The King's Speech" take place in cramped quarters that give the viewer a feeling of claustrophobia. We sense that we are inside the king's psyche, or perhaps his tortured throat as he struggles to give voice to his thoughts.

At the film's beginning, when Prince Albert gives a speech in Wembley Stadium to open an exhibition, we see just a portion of the crowd from under the canopy where the royal family sits. In later sequences the viewer follows behind the king, looking down narrow halls and moving through small doorways, and approaching a microphone much as a condemned person might approach an execution chamber.

The best scene in the film is the last, the climactic scene in which the king declares war. The room from which he speaks to the nation is a tiny studio with enough space for the speaker, the microphone, and the king's therapist, to whom the king delivers his speech as though he were speaking to only one other person. The entire scene is shot in close-up, and both actors deliver a wonderful moment of intense, measured emotion.

**T**hough I enjoy history and I often choose to see historical films I must confess to a limited appreciation for costume dramas. I think it is because the dress-up clothes and silly hats so often break the mood and remind me that I'm watching actors at work.

In "The King's Speech" there were few false notes to break the spell-from beginning to end. I was experiencing a story, rather than watching a movie. "The King's Speech" offered me an opportunity to

do something I was not sure was possible: to identify with a man who lives in the rarified world of royalty, and to see him as—how shall I say it?—as a man.

—*Dave Greiser is a frightened public speaker who has survived 25 years in various preaching roles. His latest audience of guinea pigs is the North Baltimore Mennonite Church, in Baltimore, Maryland.*



# An Atheist Reflects on Anabaptism

Alan Soffin

**I**n thinking about the problems for respondents and other avowed theists who are Mennonites, I returned to the description of Anabaptism one finds repeated in different sources. With respect to the immediately schismatic decision against infant baptism in favor of “adult: commitment (and baptism) I could conceive no reason for the decision save that adults are assumed to be able to make mature, informed judgments.

It seemed and seems to me that insistence upon adult commitment could not have been based only on age, size, strength, citizen status or responsibility according to law, common or formal. There had to be a reason that was more than formal, more than *merely* a group-sanctioned rule, for risking obloquy or worse by rejecting infant baptism and, frankly, running the risk of waiting until adulthood to ask for commitment.

The only plausible candidate for insisting on adult commitment was surely the notion that

with adulthood comes what is called “maturity”—maturity not of body but of judgment. And surely there can be no way to distinguish immaturity from maturity of mind save by the ability to distinguish what is true from what is false and what is right from what is wrong.

Since truth and right are not mere matters of opinion (else how sanely to insist on right or wrong religions or religious practices?), they

**Religion asks for the meaning of life . . . this is what Anabaptism . . . realized was not a subject for early, uninformed, immature commitment.**

must have essentially to do with we we know. What we know and what we only think are for human beings the two opposite banks of life’s river. Only the bank of knowledge can keep us from death in the river. Thus the question of commitment presupposes a judgment upon evidence and inference. It presupposes, in short, the quest for wisdom.

**A**nd so, as John Dewey wisely said, “Anyone who has begun to think places some portion of the world in jeopardy.” To think honestly is not to know the answer beforehand, and not to know the answer beforehand is to risk a conflict between what you hope for, what you live by, and what is true or possible.

Our origin, our meaning, and our direction are profound and difficult subjects. Is it a surprise that these, one way or another, should be subject to difficult changes? Religion asks for the meaning of life—how to live and how to die. To my mind this is what Anabaptism, as I read it its origin, realized was not a subject for early, uninformed, immature commitment.

Nor, to my mind, can it rest on faith, for faith can be entered upon without information or mature judgment. A child can have faith just as an adult can. And if we say only an adult can have “genuine” or “real” or “authentic” faith, then we are implicitly insisting that reason and truth and profundity of feeling must be the foundation of any hopeful or trusting commitment. We are back to inquiry and the absence of guaranteed outcomes to honest investigations.

Finally, having faith is a decision, not an isolated act. This aspect of it too entails responsibility and groundedness rather than pure, abstract, choice.

For these reasons, the spirit—indeed, the distinguishing principle—of Anabaptism is its implicit presupposition of wisdom as the ground of commitment. In this way, to my surprise, I find myself in the same tradition, striving to know the truth with respect to humanity's origin, place, and role.

With Anabaptism, I understand that the answers cannot themselves be a matter simply of choice. Rather, they must be founded on the hardest reflection—on experience, on testimony, on literature, on history, and on the truths revealed in the context of vocation, family, and love (the context of consequence and responsibility).

—*Alan Soffin, Doylestown, Pennsylvania, numbers among his interests philosophy, religion, filmmaking, writing, and music ranging from classical through jazz and international sounds. Soffin is author of the new book Rethinking Religion: Beyond Scientism, Theism, and Philosophic Doubt (Cascadia, 2011).*

# Tongue Screws and Testimonies

Cynthia Page

**H**ow could a beautiful and sweet young woman like Kirsten come up with this title for the book she edited? It made me uncomfortable. I felt creepy.

So imagine how I felt about attending the reading to celebrate the publishing of this book of reflections on *The Martyr's Mirror*. Not interested at all. I would prefer not to know about it. I had never heard of *The Martyr's Mirror* until Kirsten told me of her project. After a brief investigation via the Internet, her interest in the topic was a mystery to me too. But the invitation was on my Facebook page. I decided to go.

I adored Kirsten. She was bright and clever and fun. She and I were married to cousins. She had been my salvation at family gatherings. While the rest of the family reminisced about days and people long gone, she talked to me.

Although Kirsten and I share the “married into the family” status, she shared something im-

portant with them that I do not. She was of the Mennonite faith and raised in a Mennonite home. My husband, Ray, left that church long ago and some of his siblings have also found other paths to the divine, but the aunts, uncles, cousins, and their children follow their Anabaptist heritage. I wanted to go to her book reading to show my support. I planned to buy of copy of the book.

**I** don't understand the Mennonites. The "old order Mennonites," those who live near the extreme edge of the culture, are especially puzzling. They have rules and customs that are designed to set them apart from the world. But the lines and boundaries don't make sense to me.

**I don't understand the Mennonites. . . . The lines and boundaries don't make sense to me.**

Once we stopped at an old order Mennonite buggy shop. As we pulled into the driveway we noticed there were no electric lines going to the house. As the owner showed us his work I asked how long it took to do it by hand. He explained that he used a computerized laser drill for the work he was showing me. No dishwasher or vacuum in the house, but a computerized laser drill in the shop. I tried to understand.

For one family, a car was not permitted, but they had automobile tires and car seats on their wooden wagon. I tried to understand.

Recently, I saw a young woman in a coffee shop wearing plain clothes and a hair covering, surfing the Internet with ear buds in. I tried to understand.

Kirsten and the rest of the family did not follow these old order practices, but there was a separateness about them. Although they were unfailingly kind, something held me apart from them as surely as the fence encircling Kirsten's chicken coop holds out stray dogs. I hoped the reading might allow me a moment inside the fence.

**T**he night of the reading was cold. It was dark early, as it is in late fall. I was unfamiliar with the small college campus and the location of

the chapel where the reading would be held. Ray was out of town so, map in hand, I made my way alone. I followed a young couple up the sidewalk hoping they were also going to the reading. They were. They showed me the way.

The crowd unbundled from their coats, gloves, and scarves and settled into the seats of the chapel. I was pleased to see the room was mostly full. I was happy and proud for Kirsten. As she introduced the program, Kirsten said Mennonites were a blend of pride and humility, of insularity and outreach. Yes! She succinctly captured a description that addressed the confusion I felt about the Mennonites.

But there was more to it—that was only a partial description. One of the first presenters was an older man with snow white hair, a neatly trimmed mustache and erect posture. He looked the part of the emeriti faculty member that he was. He read excerpts from *The Martyr's Mirror*. As copies of the book's original illustrations were projected on a wall, he read the accompanying gruesome stories of brave men and women who were tortured and killed for their faith.

Surprisingly, an element of magic was included in some of the stories. For instance a stake, upon which a woman was burned to death, later bloomed. A strange combination—torture and magic—how do Mennonites understand that?

**After the reading of the tortures ended, the evening improved.**

After the reading of the tortures ended, the evening improved. The young writers who read from their works weren't entirely comfortable *with The Martyr's Mirror*. They revered it as they revered their grandparents. And they have moved past it as they have moved past their grandparents' ways and have embraced computers, cell phones, and Facebook.

And yet, they searched for meaning in the stories. The sharing of their conflicting emotions had the audience laughing out loud. It wasn't the evening I had feared. I feared I might leave the reading feeling guilt ridden because I had not made sufficient sacrifices for my faith, but I left with a lilt in my step.

But was it the evening I had hoped for? Had I seen inside the fence? What was there? I saw struggle, discomfort, and uncertainty. Kirsten captured it in the book's opening essay:

“The distance between me and the Martyrs is a comfortable one. I can imagine them from afar like classical heroes. . . . If I pursue them and they turn back to close the gap and grasp my hand, what will I do?” (*Tongue Screws and Testimonies: Poems, Stories and Essays Inspired by the Martyrs Mirror*, Herald Press, 2010, p. 38).

What will I do?

As I sat in my cold car and started the engine to head home, I felt a little sorry that I didn't have a big book of my own that was a pivotal point of my history. That feeling has surprised me. Was I lacking something? Or was my jealousy a reaction to their cultural pride?

A few weeks later I visited my mother in Lynchburg. She was about to throw out an oversized light blue book with a navy blue fabric spine. “You can have it if you want it,” she said as she handed it to me to examine. The gold letters on the spine were nearly faded away but I could make out the title, *The Illustrated Treasury of Children's Literature*. Inside she had written “Tommy and Cynthia Floyd” and the date she had bought it. On the facing page the title was highlighted by wobbly pencil circles. The table of contents and several other pages were similarly decorated with squiggles and twirls.

I remembered poring over this book as a child. Was this my pivotal book, the key to my heritage? Did it shape me as *The Martyr's Mirror* shaped Kirsten? Somehow it didn't seem as noble. Little Jack Horner just didn't stack up with torture and sacrifice, but it did contain magic.

I thumbed through the book. The musty smell was strong. I looked at the familiar illustrations. I saw a princess sleeping on a stack of mattresses, two children approaching a cottage made of gingerbread, a marionette with a very long nose, a stuffed bear with a jar of honey. I closed the book and smiled, remembering that I had bought a similar volume from the Literary Guild for my children when they were young. I brought the book home.

Was there a connection between *Tongue Screws and Testimonies* and *The Illustrated Treasury of Children's Literature*? I hunted for an answer—scratching and pecking at ideas just as Kirsten's chickens scratch and peck at the ground. My book had fairy tales, stories written to delight and amuse, not the record of brave suffering for a divine cause. But the fairy tales had lessons too. Honesty, ingenuity, loyalty, and bravery were there alongside the whimsy and fun. I shook my head to clear it. Was I trying too hard to make this work for me?

**Closing the musty book, I knew there was one thing I shared with Kirsten and the Mennonites. We wanted to find our place.**

Closing the musty book, I knew there was one thing I shared with Kirsten and the Mennonites. We wanted to find our place. We searched for our place in our birth family and in the family we married into and in our world. Sometimes it was a struggle to fit the past into our evolving understanding of the present. Maybe all of us are riding in a wooden wagon fitted with automobile tires—traveling part in the past and part in the present. Thankfully our touchstone stories guide us. And a little magic now and then doesn't hurt either.

—*Cynthia F. Page, Harrisonburg, Virginia, has lived in the Shenandoah Valley for nearly five years and is budget director at James Madison University*



# Thoughts on the Death of Osama bin Laden

Daniel Liechty

**T**he news that morning was that Osama bin Laden was dead. He chose to live by the sword, and so it had come about that he also had died by the sword. I avoided further news broadcasts that morning because I knew for sure that they would be chock full of celebratory, victorious high-fiving indistinguishable from a sporting event. I avoided these displays not because I felt myself better or above such celebration, but exactly because I knew I was not. The desire for heroic victory over evil animates all of us, myself definitely included.

Yet only a few short days before, as part of the Passover Seder (a ritual of Judaism increasingly celebrated in many Christian circles as well) we had reminded ourselves that even the death of an enemy of our people is nonetheless the death of a fellow human being, one of God's own creations.

This is the reminder of Moses, even as the people dance to Miriam's Song of the Sea, celebrating the drowning of Pharaoh's army.

Are we then wrong to feel relief and even elation in the vanquishing of an enemy of our people? Should we browbeat ourselves and feel guilty for such feelings? Can we demand this of ourselves and remain human beings! If we demand of ourselves the complete abolition of such feelings, it can only be "achieved" by layer upon layer of denial, of refusing to recognize within ourselves that which is truly there.

This said, I do think there is great wisdom in the fact that our ancestors placed this reminder on the lips of Moses right at that celebratory juncture. It raises the question, does our sense of joy in this death, and the accompanying lack of mourning and indifference in our souls for the life of Osama bin Laden, reflect our highest nature and sense of self, not that which we are, but that toward which we strive to become? What should we teach our children, when they ask about this part of the Seder?

I frankly don't know. But this is what I have tried to pass on to my child—that in placing this reminder on the lip of Moses, our ancestors meant to remind us that if we revel in, justify, and perpetuate soul indifference even here, in the death of our enemies, this plants a seed which grows into soul indifference in many other areas of our life.

**If we revel in . . . the death of our enemies, this  
plants a seed. . . .**

This soul indifference eventually becomes a mortal threat to our essential quest as ethical monotheists, well summarized in the "Mi-she-berekh," the prayer for healing—"let us find the courage to make our lives a blessing."

Ultimately, soul indifference does not stand still. It is either spreading or being beat back in our individual and collective life. In deciding the direction we will go, our duty is to listen to this reminder of Moses, strategically placed in the Passover Haggadah, most especially on this day of nationalistic rejoicing.

—*Dan Liechty, Normal, Illinois, teaches human behavior in the School of Social Work, Illinois State University.*

# From Jonathan Edwards to Karl Rove

*A Review of Head and Heart*

## Daniel Hertzler

*Head and Heart: American Christianities*, by  
Gary Wills. The Penguin Press, 2007.

This is a useful book, even though I perceive that its focus is too narrow. The history of Christianity in America is covered from a centrist perspective, generally emphasizing English traditions. Churches with other ethnic origins are hard largely ignored. Mennonites have three references in the index but Church of the Brethren and even Lutherans are not mentioned. Disciples of Christ and Free Methodists appear only briefly. Assemblies of God and Pentecostals are not included.

However, Wills appears not to be concerned to cover denominational variety but rather to chronicle certain religious developments in America. He is interested in the civil rights move-

ment, but conscientious objection to war does not appear on his screen. References to war generally report how the churches supported war.

Yet there is a lot to be learned from this book. In the beginning the author indicates his intention to consider religion of the head as in the Enlightenment and religion of the heart such as Evangelicalism. “The dominant religious culture of the colonies, in both the Congregational North and the largely Anglican South, was Calvinist” (5). He does not trace this back to Calvin, but we remember that, in Geneva, Calvin sought to keep church and state in touch so that the one supported the other.

A significant difference in the U.S. has been the separation of church and state. This separation was designed by early American leaders who, as Wills documents, were not pious Christians, as some today would like to see them, but mostly deists. It is true that Washington was an Anglican who attended church, but he did not take communion. When this became an issue, he quit attending church.

This separation of church and state is discussed at length in the book, and it occurs to me that it is more important to us minorities than we might remember. Recently I read the article on “Alsace” in *Mennonite Encyclopedia* and was impressed by the pressure to conform to European militarism, a pressure which sent numbers of Mennonites to the new world.

This separation has never been complete, for some still like to see religion influence government and vice-versa, particularly in times of war going back to the American Revolution. An oral family tradition says that John Hertzler, son of our Hertzler patriarch, Jacob Hertzler, was imprisoned in Reading, Pennsylvania, and threatened with execution for his refusal to join the Revolutionary army. According to this tradition, a Lutheran pastor defended him, and his life was spared.

**W**ills begins with Puritanism, a Calvinist perspective which did not perceive a separation between church and state but which had to concede as time went on. Some interesting details in the book tell of ethical practices of early leaders: Jonathan Edwards, a famous Puritan theologian, kept slaves. Also Ben Franklin and George Whitefield, a

famous revivalist. Whitefield owned a ranch in Georgia and declined to free his slaves even though some Christians challenged him.

Numbers of Quakers also held slaves, but several Quakers witnessed against this with some success. One was John Woolman, whose name is familiar. Others were Benjamin Lay and Anthony Benezet to whom the book is dedicated. Benezet is “a person now less famous than Woolman but more influential in his day, not only in the colonies but in Europe and the Caribbean” (145).

**Wills’ thesis is that both Enlightenment (head religion) and Evangelicalism (heart religion) influenced our history.**

Wills’ thesis is that both Enlightenment (head religion) and Evangelicalism (heart religion) influenced our history. “Benezet and Woolman had a foot each camp and their moral arguments would serve as a basis for nineteenth century abolitionism” (152). A problem they faced was that numbers of slaveowners claimed there is no clear-cut argument against slavery in the Bible. So the abolitionists went beyond literal Bible verses to oppose it.

Key to Wills development is his description of three Great Religious Awakenings. These were times when heart religion appeared to prevail. But, as Wills shows, all passed. The first in the 1730s and 1740s cooled almost as fast as it began and, as Wills reports, played “a preparatory role for the Enlightenment—not as a precursor of it but as a provocation. The Enlightenment was spurred by the reaction to the Awakening” (102).

The second part of the book is entitled “Enlightened Religion” and deals with various reactions to the Awakening. By roughly 1800 “the Enlightenment had done its work. It had founded the nation, and drafted the Constitution and passed the first Amendment. And in the labors of the Quakers it had begun the long struggle to end slavery in America” (134). Woolman and Benezet are given their due as part of this process.

**F**rom here Wills begins an extended discussion of the effort to “disestablish” religion in the American democracy. He observes that “The theology of establishment is simple and still appeals to many in America. The argument is that a nation must honor God in order for God to bless and protect it” (176).

He describes at some length the efforts of early leaders to separate faith and politics, an effort which has never been completely successful. From here he goes on to the second Great Awakening, which began in the first half of the nineteenth century. It was to help fuel the Civil War when both sides perceived that God was on their side. It would lead eventually to Prohibition.

Billy Sunday exemplified the excesses of Evangelicalism/Fundamentalism. He supported both World War I and Prohibition. The second decade of the twentieth century brought Evangelicals low. “Prohibition failed, the Scopes trial exposed them to ridicule, and compromising involvement with the Ku Klux Klan and other anti-Catholic efforts made them look bigoted in the campaign against Al Smith, the Democratic candidate for president” (415).

**But evangelical political power would rise again in the presidency of George W. Bush. . . .**

But evangelical political power would rise again in the presidency of George W. Bush, who said “that he felt God had called him to run for president in 2000. . . .” He “promised his Evangelical followers faith-based social services” and gave them “a faith-based war, faith-based law enforcement, faith-based education, faith-based medicine, and faith-based science” (498).

This was possible because Bush’s political “handler,” Karl Rove, knew how to find the right people to engineer these operations. “No campaign consultant,” Wills asserts, “ever went on to be such an arbiter of all things political within an administration as Karl Rove. . . .”

“Rove made the executive branch of the United States more openly and avowedly religious than it had ever been,” avers Wills,

“though he had no discernible religious beliefs himself. His own indifference allowed him to be ecumenical in his appeal to Protestants, Catholics and Jews” (516).

In “Life After Rove” Wills observes that enough persons in Florida voted for Nader in 2000 to give the election to Bush. “This means that the voters for Nader are responsible for the war in Iraq, the huge tax cuts (and resulting deficit), and the whole faith-based government that resulted from the 2000 election.” But, “The way to a post-Rove is open, if only the American electorate will follow it” (546).

The Epilogue proposes “Separation, Not Suppression.” Wills observes that “It is hard to strike the right balance between the two religious tendencies. . . . but the comforting reflection is that hard self-examination on both sides has brought them back toward the precarious but persisting balance. It is an inspiring thing to watch” (552).

As I wrote above, I find this book a useful review of a certain line of American religiosity but more narrowly focused than I would prefer. Non-English traditions are scarcely noticed. Significant American theologians do not get noticed. H. Richard Niebuhr has one mention and his brother Reinhold has three. Walter Brueggemann, John Howard Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas, and William Willimon are not heard from.

Wills seems preoccupied with religion as a source of political power. Is there no other way to conceive of the relation between church and state than power in the ballot box? I found a sort of answer to my discontent in *Interpretation* (July 2010), an issue dedicated to conversation between Jews and Christians. A Jewish writer, Randi Rashkover, has written an article with the impressive title, “Judaism, Multiculturalism, and the Power of Politics: Reconsidering Judaism’s Role in the Public Square.” What have we here?

Near the end of the article Rashkover draws from John Howard Yoder, “The Spirit of God and the Politics of Men” where Yoder finds that the political posture of the Christian is “liturgical, it is testimonial. . . . a Christian political posture remains focused on its commitment to God in its perpetual designment of the character and actions appropriate to this commandment.”

Further, “It’s power funded by the God whom it praises, the community may proceed with the important work it must do, devoid of the fear or sense of scarcity that drives most political missions, it can engage freely and on behalf of others whose needs and interests must be recognized and served” (282, 283). Rashkover finds here a model of political strategy which he perceives that Jews can also follow.

The chapter he refers to is chapter 11 in *For the Nations: Essays Public and Evangelical* (Eerdmans) published in 1997, the year that Yoder died. This chapter was based on a lecture given in South Africa in 1979, a time when Christians in South Africa were in a position to ponder their options. The development of the theme is typical Yoder. He points out that the topic “should not be taken to mean—as many like to think—that God and his Spirit are in one world and ‘men’ and their politics in another” (221). The difference is rather that there is a politics of the Spirit and another of men.

Yoder reviews Isaiah 42, 49, and 50 as an example of the Spirit’s politics in an earlier time. He moves on to the gospel of Luke and finally to issues of the current time.

Basic to Yoder’s development is a list of contrasts between “the politics of rebellious mankind” and that of the Spirit of God. For example, “In the politics of rebellious men, all history is a zero-sum game. Pillage is as good as cooperation as long as you get what you need. In the Spirit of God, on the other hand, we hope, we communicate, we invent. We are free to improve the rules of the game so you can win without my losing” (231).

In Wills’ religious history, some have won while others lost. A typical example was the Civil War when, as he points out, the churches had divided before the government did. Both sides were convinced that God was on their side. Wills hope for better. Yoder and Rashkover suggest a better model than any Wills has reported or evidently imagined.

—*Daniel Hertzler, Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, is an editor, writer, and chair of the elders, Scottsdale Mennonite Church.*



## Today at Lunch

Noël R. King

**T**oday at lunch I saw Anne Frank walking by the side of the road. Although quite pale and thin, she seemed to be enjoying the sunshine.

She was talking to a little boy walking next to her, so I did not worry too much about her. If she had been by herself, I would have felt bad for her and wondered if she felt alone, particularly as she is some 70 or so years past the time period she would seem to be most comfortable occupying. On the other hand, perhaps she is grateful to be as far removed from that era as possible.

As I passed and recognized who she was, I longed to ask her about her life and how it had all turned out, but I quickly decided that she likely harbored little desire to sift once more through the tragic life that all the world has read about, that she would prefer instead to spend her time resting and recuperating in the twenty-first century while her psyche knits itself back together.

I am not sure why I saw her in this place and time (2011), but I have observed that the world's dimensions are shifting, and perhaps history is

remaking itself with the intent of resolving itself differently this time around. I hope so, anyway.

A scary thought, though. If Anne Frank is out there walking around, what about Adolf Hitler? Might I come home for lunch tomorrow and see him jogging past my mailbox, his infamous mustache damp with sweat as he enjoys his daily constitutional? Will my surly neighbor see him, grab a gun and shoot him, thinking this the perfect time and place to right the world?

Most people at my job do not go home for lunch, and now I am seeing why. It is far more peaceful and unsettling to sit down for a bologna sandwich in front of one's computer than it is to come face to face with the breakdown of history out here in the real world.

When I get back to work this afternoon, I will go online to see how history's changed from what they taught me as a child. Is JFK still dead since Dallas? Or will I see him eating malt balls at the movies when I go to watch the re-release of old *Ben-Hur*? Will MLK Jr. ap-

**When I get back to work this afternoon, I will go online to see how history's changed from what they taught me as a child. Is JFK still dead since Dallas?**

pear as well to drive his namesake highways, watch his famous speeches on youtube, and stay home from work on MLK Jr. Day? Will I see him drinking coffee at the Barnes & Noble Starbucks?

If old history is being made anew, from what new past might I myself appear, and who will gasp to see me walking past them in the grocery store tonight? Will Oprah Winfrey hear of me and call—quick, quick—to book me even if history has to remake the timing of her show's finale?

Byebye, bosses! You may or may not see me anymore. It depends on Who I Am when I awaken in the a.m.

—*As circumstances warrant, through her Turquoise Pen column Noël R. King, Scottsville, Virginia, reports on strange and wonderful or worrisome things, including history remaking itself.*



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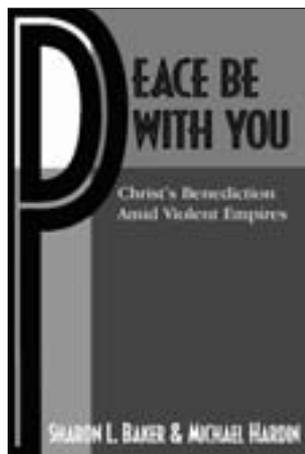
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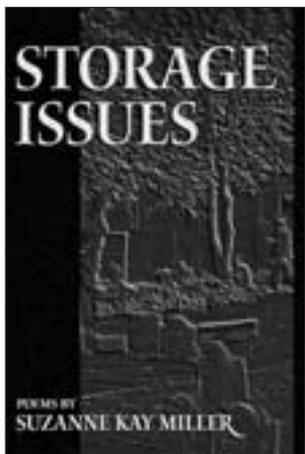
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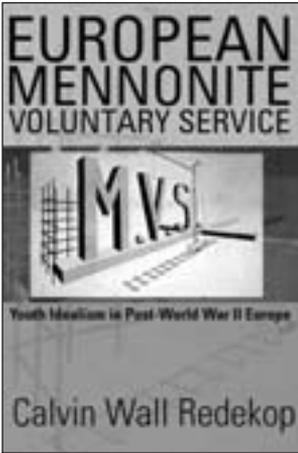
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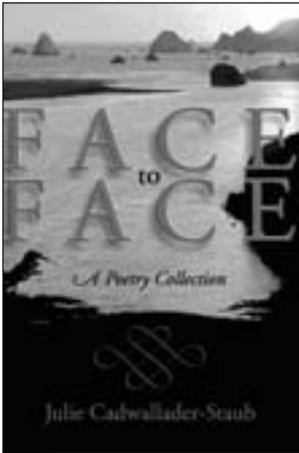
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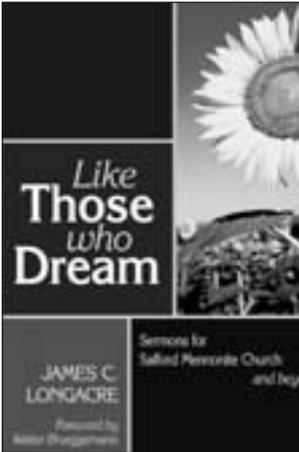
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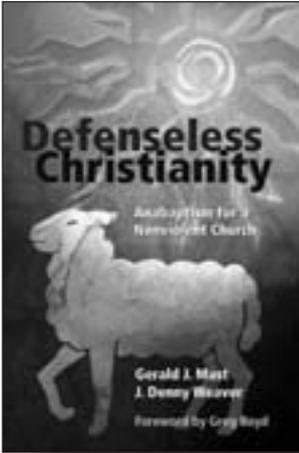
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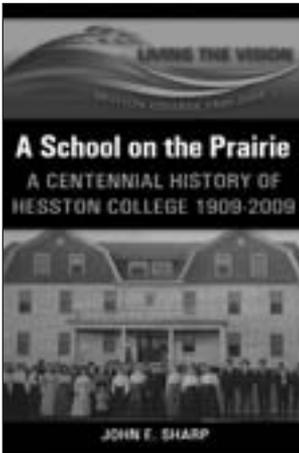
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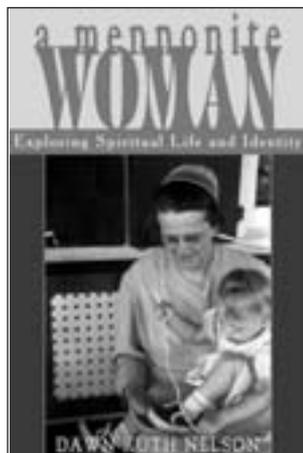
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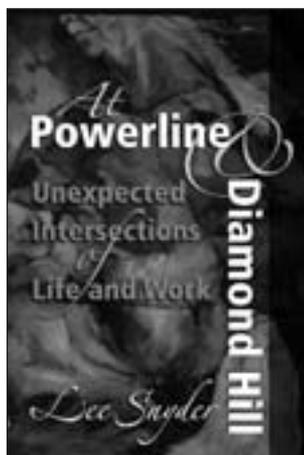
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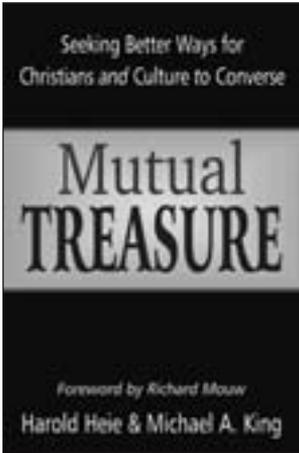
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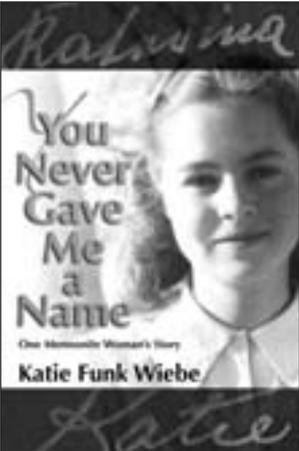
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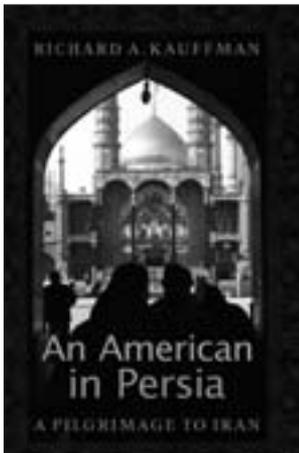
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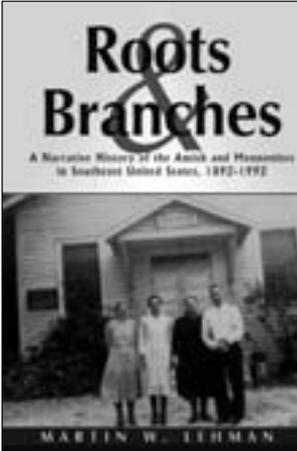
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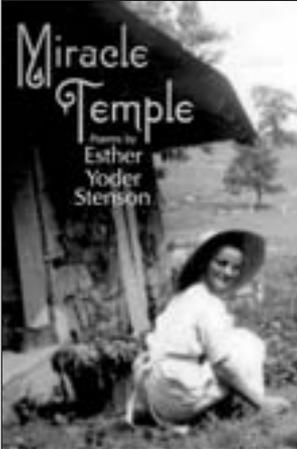
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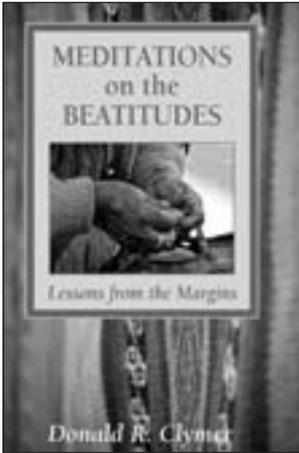
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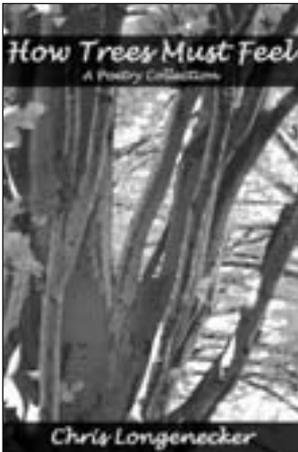
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### *How Trees Must Feel*

I think I finally know how trees must feel  
Who after years of floating seeds on hope  
Land one, smack dab, in such a lap of mud  
That the soft thud sends shudders of relief  
Through every stem, each trembling petiole.  
And all the clapping leaflets in the dome,  
And all the vessels, xylem, ray and phloem,  
Must feel the thrill from root to canopy  
Of having landed one nut perfectly!

—*Fascinated by language, particularly the metaphor, Chris Longenecker, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, has memorized, studied, and practiced writing poetry most of her life. Whether love of trees or love of poetry came first for Chris would be impossible to say. This poem is excerpted from her first collection of poems, How Trees Must Feel (Cascadia/DreamSeeker Books, 2011).*