

# **D**reamSeeker Magazine

Voices from the Soul



## **Sacred Time**

Arthur Strimling

## **Sunflower Morning**

Carol Schreck

## **Beneath the Skyline**

*Saving Moments*

Deborah Good

## **Kingsview**

*Saddling Up Our Bodies for Our Spirits to Gallop*

Michael A. King

## **From Laramie to Baghdad: Dreams of Peace in a World at War**

Hope Nisly

## **Reel Reflections**

*"Eternal Sunshine": The Sweet Torture of Memory*

David Greiser

## **The Sins Jesus Judged: Which Are They, Really?**

Randy Klassen

*and much more*

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**Summer 2004**

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## Editorial: Sacred Time and Sunflower Mornings

Sacred time. Sunflower mornings. Sacred moments. Each phrase, a title of an article in this issue of *Dream-Seeker Magazine*, overlaps with the others. Each in some way looks in the ordinary or even the twisted for the sacramental—and in some way finds or at least points to it.

Yet these articles, the first three, by Art Strimling, Carol Schreck, and Deborah Good, were written at different times

by different authors unaware of each other's work. Evidence of the sacred dimension within which each of us lives if we open ourselves to it? I like to think so.

If the other articles in this issue are not always as tightly linked to the search for the sacramental as the first three, all seem within range of it. I wrote my own column before knowing of the articles that would precede it, but my key question was how our bodies energizes traveling toward the sacred. Hope Nisly is grieving what happens when the sacred is deformed by hate or war. Dave Greiser reviews the film "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind," which turns out to have much to do with the sacred, not to mention sunshine.

Randy Klassen moves in another yet still related direction: exploring Jesus' view that a key sin is religious hypocrisy—which involves claiming to be motivated by the sacred even as baser urges steer the ship.

Perhaps I shouldn't even try to fit the next two articles into the theme.

And yet . . . as I ponder Laura Amstutz's witty exploration of the realities of life as a housewife, including why she now likes to clean the toilet, I can't resist noting that laughter at its best seems always to flirt with the sacred underside of what it laughs at. And though Glenn Lehman focuses on his dear departed, Ms. Scott Dale, there is in

fact something sacred to be sensed in his memories of his lost love.

The theme reemerges more directly in the final columns. In conversation with Ernest Hemingway's life and writings, Dan Hertzler explores the troubling fruits of believing all life is futile. Yet he manages to do so in a way that honors Hemingway even while making clear Hertzler's own commitment to life as more than futile—precisely because it is grounded in the sacred.

Next, Noël King invites us to linger on the back porch until our vision is sharp enough for us to see life in all its delicious clarity and to step into its fullness from the front porch.

Finally, the poetry of Christine Wiebe and Joyce Peachey Lind, written often in awareness of physical frailties and sometimes death, strikes me as one long engagement with the sacred, whether in fear or celebration of its immediacy.

—Michael A. King

**Each [article] in some way looks in the ordinary or even the twisted for the sacramental—and in some way finds or at least points to it.**

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**D**ear Editors: Michael King, you asked for it (in your *DreamSeeker Magazine* editorial, Winter 2004) so here it comes.

I just read your lament on the lack of women contributing to *DSM* and realize the urgency of the situation.

I am a woman, wife of one husband and mother of nine children. My eldest is editor of *DSM*, and I hope he is desperate enough to accept a letter from a woman who happens to be his mother.

Now what does a woman say? Since reading my daughter Noël's article in the same Winter 2004 issue, I see I don't really need words to express my thoughts. My "thoughts are beyond words." Mr. Editor, if necessary fill in any words and send them to me.

Your faithful fan and mother. —*Betty King*

*Letters to DreamSeeker Magazine are encouraged. We also welcome and, when possible, publish extended responses (max. 400 words).*

### *I Wish*

I wish if I am going to get that close to death  
that I could see it. Why didn't I see Jesus?  
Why didn't I see the pearly gate, or talk to St. Peter?  
Maybe I did this, but I don't remember. Maybe I am  
destined for hell. But I've already been there.  
Hell is not so far away. And I called myself a Christian.  
And I went to hell. Maybe they need some kindly influence  
in those hellish parts. In those hospital parts.  
I wish I could remember something earth shaking  
to tell my family. What happens when you die?  
I wish

—*Christine R. Wiebe, Hillsboro, Kansas, was born in 1954 and died in 2000 after battling lupus much of her life. As her mother Katie Funk Wiebe reports, she wrote mainly about relationships, especially family relationships; hospital experiences and dying; and her love of nature and language. She struggled with the role of faith as it related to her slowly deteriorating body. Her gravestone inscription summarizes her life and faith: "Daughter, sister, friend. Though heart and body fail, God is my possession forever. Psalm 73:26." Except for one poem by another author, the poetry sections of this issue of DreamSeeker Magazine are dedicated to Christine and her moving words.*

# Sacred Time

Arthur Strimling

I was watching the World Series and thinking about Shabbat, about sacred time. I got to this weird connection as I was telling myself that I have to stop watching so much TV. At this time of year I always tell myself I have to watch less TV. There's the regular stuff—"West Wing" and Jon Stewart, interspersed between reruns of "Law and Order."

We're "Law and Order" junkies. The worst. But we have rules. If we've seen it three times already, we can't watch it again. Well, if both of us have seen it three times, which makes like six times. Or if someone we know is on it, or there's a weird address we want to locate, or it's a good one with subtle legal complexities and a serious debate about the death penalty between Jack and one of his smart, passionate and oh-so-gorgeous assistant DAs. That's the normal fare.

But now there are the playoffs, the league championships, and the World Series, which makes about a month of maybe 20 more hours a week of obsessive watching. I love it. I love baseball. I love baseball on TV. I watch baseball during the season too, but usually only two or three innings at a time.

It's like restaurants in Italy. They have these long menus with course after course. Usually I just have meat or pasta, salad, some local wine, and it's plenty.

But there's the food equivalent of the World Series, like maybe you're in Montepulciano, the most beautiful hill town in the world, and it's truffle season, so you go for the whole thing—antipasto, Primi, Segundi, Terza Rima, Quattrocento, Marcello Mastroianni, Gina Lollobrigida, the whole thing. That's the World Series. As soon as it's over I'm watching less TV. As soon as it's over.

But now I'm watching. But watching baseball is totally different from watching normal TV. It's sooooo slow. It's like this: Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. . . . Something! Nothing, nothing, nothing, something!, nothing, nothing, hint of something, then a lot more nothing.

It's like waiting for Messiah. You wait and watch and hope, hoping that in this small universe, this microcosm, the fallible players who stand in for us, and their fallible leaders, will somehow conspire with the fates or luck or the unknown underlying plan that only the kabbalists of baseball can fathom, to create conditions that will in the late innings allow for the arrival of Messiah:

Mariano Rivera. The perfect closer. The one you absolutely want in there pitching when you've got a one run lead and a guy on second and their best hitter at bat. The one you know will get you out of that jam. Mariano of perfect beauty and grace, on whose arm we ride to the land of milk and honey.

That's what it's going to be like when Messiah arrives. Or maybe it will be like Aaron Boone hitting a walk-off home run. Sudden stunning

utterly unexpected bliss. I think it depends on if you feel chosen or not. If you feel chosen, then it's Mariano. You see the moment coming, you sit back and relax and let it wash over you. But if you are unsure about your chosen-ness, if you're ambivalent about the whole idea, then it will be a sudden ecstatic surprise, it will be Aaron Boone in the last of the eleventh.

**B**ut Shabbat, I was thinking about Shabbat. Because baseball gives you all this empty time while Joe Torre is deciding whether to take out Boomer, or move Matsui out or the infield in. Baseball is like Shabbat obviously because it has all this ritual. Anyone who has ever watched Nomar Garciaparra at bat knows all about ritual. It's like the most obsessive shukling you have ever witnessed.

Or a pitcher, any pitcher, going through his motion of checking a runner on first. They all have their form and they all repeat it exactly, as if the motion itself will keep the runner on base. It's like a desperate prayer—if I only say it perfectly right, then God will hear me and keep my runner on first or even make the miracle of a double play.

And it's so easy to get distracted watching a game . . . like Shabbat services. For instance, the other night Derek Jeter is at bat. The camera stays on him when he's at bat, and we get a long view of him and the catcher and the ump, but also of that big advertising sign behind home plate, which they've digitalized now, so it changes ads every time they want. I'm sure

they sell ad space on that sign not just by minutes or innings, but by players. You know, more if it's Sammy Sosa up there than if it's Karim Garcia. More when Soriano is hitting .330 than when he's striking out every time.

And with Derek up and it's the World Series, you know it's really expensive. And some genius bought Derek's at-bats. Because Derek has this unchanging between-pitch ritual. It starts with the bat in his front hand, his left hand because he hits righty, and the bat is drooping down toward the plate, then he slowly arcs it back and around until his arm is extended out toward the pitcher and the bat is straight up, rampant, defiant, and there he stops, pauses, while he extends his right arm, hand up, back toward the ump, as if to let him know he's not yet ready to receive the pitch.

That's what I always thought he was doing, but this time I noticed that that back arm, his right arm, was also pointing straight back to that sign. His left hand is holding the bat straight up in the air and his right arm is pointing toward the sign and on the sign in huge letters it says, "VIA-GRRA." Now that's advertising genius, and I ask you, how do you keep your mind on the game in a moment like that?

**A**nway, I'm thinking baseball is like Shabbat because it's so slow, so out of time. So useless and wonderful and all about nothing happening. On Shab-

bat we work at making nothing happen. We pray, we walk, we read, we nap, maybe make love. And we argue about an ancient text that does and does not have anything to do with how we live, and we're supposed to do all this for its own sake alone, not because we hope to get anything out of it except a sort of bliss that renews us for the struggle of the rest of our lives.

**Anyway, I'm thinking baseball is like Shabbat because it's so slow, so out of time. So useless and wonderful and all about nothing happening. On Shabbat we work at making nothing happen.**

But baseball isn't like Shabbat in one big way. It isn't timebound. A game goes on until someone wins. It could be two hours or five. Whitey Ford used to get a bonus if he finished a game in under two hours. Now they want them to go on and on, so they can have more commercials. But no one ever knows how long a game will be.

And I love that about baseball in the same way I love the idea of waiting for Messiah. It could be today or it could be tomorrow or in 10 years or a thousand, but she's coming. The one of perfect grace and beauty who will pitch those last outs and somehow we will all win that one.

But Shabbat *is* timebound; no matter what, it goes from sunset Friday to sundown Saturday, and I am so grateful to God or whoever made it that way. Because, imagine if every Shabbat was like a baseball game; you had to stay in it until you arrived at some state of grace. I mean some weeks it's awful, nothing works, I'm frazzled and neurotic and hopeless

and no matter how I go through the motions Shabbat does not happen inside me.

Yet it still goes by. Imagine if I had to pray and rest and study and whatever else until I got it right, whatever that is. I'd be sunk. The pressure!

This way, I just go through it knowing how long it is, how much time I have, and whatever happens happens. I taste heaven or I don't, and it's over and I have to go back to work. No pressure. Which I guess is what Shabbat is all about.

I have to stop watching so much TV.

—*Arthur Strimling is the Maggid HaMakom (Storyteller-in-Residence) of Congregation Kolot Chayeinu (Voices of Our Lives) in Park Slope, Brooklyn, and performs and leads workshops at venues around the country. Heinemann Press has just published his book Roots & Branches: Creating Inter-generational Theater, about the theater company Arthur directs.*

### *For a Thousand Nights*

You love us with the blue of the evening,  
the green that graces the gray bark of the birch.  
You put us all to bed with the silver kisses of stars.  
All night you rock us gently between the planets  
holding the day in check with all your strength.

—Christine R. Wiebe

## Sunflower Morning

Carol Schreck

**“H**i, Mom and Dad, it's me. I know you want to keep your 10 vacation days free, but I'd like to make a request that you meet me for an early morning picnic breakfast on Tuesday.”

After hearing Rachel's voicemail, I thought, *There's little in this world I wouldn't do for my daughter. So I guess it will be an early morning start on Tuesday.* Peter, my husband, readily agreed to Rachel's request.

The 7:00 a.m. event began as we loaded the picnic basket, two dogs, and the three of us into Rachel's van. Rachel's husband, Park, had to work, so he did not accompany us. The 10-minute drive to the secret destination wove through the rolling Chester County countryside with its stone fences, Black Angus cows, and winding country roads.

We pulled up to the Meirick Nature Center, a familiar spot for early morning walks, as evidenced by the enthusiastic tail wagging of the dogs.

We were the only picnickers so it was easy for Rachel to find a table. She opened her basket and spread a blue-and-white checkered tablecloth, napkins, and a feast of fruit, juice, coffee, and still-warm-from-the-bakery sticky buns.

Oh, Lord, what a class act! This daughter of mine gives beauty and presence to everything she does.



After saying grace, Rachel invited us to partake of the bounty. How is it that I can become a delighted child at the table of my adult daughter? Have I got it right or have I conceded my maternal role?

I ate with such joy and abandon that the question of maternal responsibility took wings and vanished. It was a sacred moment; perhaps the highlight of the summer. As we enjoyed the splendid meal, the dogs roamed and hunted, eventually returning to circle our table, now impatient for their walk.

We packed up the picnic basket and set out on a path that looped around cornfields ripe with their fattened ears of corn. The dogs led the way, occasionally darting off the trail, their noses tracking the scent of squirrel, hedgehog, or deer. Our senses were accosted by the silent stillness of this wildlife sanctuary. In hushed voices we marveled at this nature preserve so close to the hustle and bustle and yet so far from the frenetic pace of our daily lives.

As we rounded the final part of the loop, Rachel told us to get ready for a surprise. Sure enough, stretching out in front of us were rows and rows of bright yellow sunflowers; their brilliance caused our eyes to squint. Each flower's face was turned toward the sun, each standing at attention in perfect lines. Even the thousands of bees

and yellow birds darting from flower to flower never caused them to compromise their orderly presence. A golden aura filled the meadow, the sight of which left us speechless as we tried to absorb the moment.

Could my small Olympus camera begin to capture such beauty? I clicked picture after picture of this ocean of gold. Rachel and I swam in the waves of flowers showing only our faces as Peter snapped more pictures.

It was time to leave.

Rachel had to get to work. Taking in one last glimpse of that sea of golden flowers, I realized that we humans, too, are most beautiful and perhaps even brilliant, when our faces turn toward the Son, for indeed our very life depends upon the energy provided by God,

the Creator and Sustainer of all living things.

This early morning outing, orchestrated by my daughter Rachel, I wouldn't have missed for the world. What a gift she is and what a gift she gave me on that sunflower summer morning.

—*Carol Young Schreck is associate professor of marriage and family at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wynnewood, Pennsylvania, and a marriage and family therapist at Kairos Counseling Services, Devon, Pennsylvania.*



## Saving Moments

Deborah Good

**S**it down and watch the world. Yes, there. See that empty patch of grass? Fold your legs beneath you, lean your weight back on your palms, and pay attention.

A woman named Lois writes a letter from prison, reminding me to “stop and smell the roses.” We’ve heard the advice countless times before, but it means something more when coming from behind bars. From where she sits, my day of mundane tasks is a wealth of color and story and noise. For today, for Lois, I will do my best to escape my own thought life and fleshly walls, and really see the world around me in all its beauty, grief, and interconnectedness. I will try to pay attention to the little things.

Every day, I pass hundreds of people and forget that behind every face is a life story. I walk right by tiny wonders—a child talking to a lollipop, a ladybug on a fence post, a textured cloud, a funny-looking dog.

I read the paper, jump on the subway, buy a pair of jeans, visit a prison, and neglect to see the troubling fibers that connect them: The woman arrested on the news will spend years of her life in prison, working for a pittance, making the jeans I might buy someday (note: the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution outlaws slavery “except as punishment for crime”). An Iraqi man in Fallujah dies wearing those

same jeans, while the money spent on missiles and jails is *not* subsidizing the public transportation system I take to work. And I will pay more for my transpass next month.

“Will you wake?” asks Reverend Parris in Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible*. “Will you open your eyes?”

**I** like waiting at the Nineteenth Street trolley stop. It’s a small, quiet station, down one flight of stairs from the busy city overhead. There’s not much to look at but the four sets of tracks and the dark, steel beams that stand between them. The tracks closest to me are for trolleys. Just beyond those lie tracks for the subway trains, which don’t stop here; they only pass through. I sit on a bench and half-heartedly open a magazine.

Then, it comes. I hear the subtle roar building to my left, growing louder and louder as it nears, until I almost cover my ears and cower against the wall. The train roars past, metal wheels against metal tracks, all the wind and noise echoing through the long tunnels and against beams and walls. It is a frightening and awesome experience. My hair tussles in the artificial wind. Trash jumps around on the tracks. For those few brief moments, I feel like I’m 12, riding my first roller coaster. Then it is gone.

My freshman year of college, I took the Myers-Briggs personality test. Four letters—INFP—and the computer printed eight pages about me (Introvert-Intuitive-Feeling-Perceiving). I still remember one section of the printout because it resonates so well with me. INFPs, it said, vacillate

between two primary desires. Some days, we are monks. We dig up our insides like gardens. We sit by ourselves on the porch and write. We leave parties early to be alone. Other days, we are explorers. We create new projects, foster new ideas. We busy ourselves with hard work. We want to change the world.

I am monk and explorer. At times I have tried to chart this: I mark my calendar with Ms and Es and look for patterns. E. B. White writes, “I arise in the morning torn between a desire to improve (or save) the world and a desire to enjoy (or savor) the world. This makes it hard to plan the day.”

But both sides of my personality have a downfall. They are both self-absorbed. Whether I’m busy with self-reflection or with work, I can easily forget to look around me.

The news this morning was enough to make me set all reading aside and spend my train ride in prayer. I still believe—and hope with my whole being—that the arc of the universe really does bend toward justice, as Martin Luther King observed in 1967; that all war and terror, all lynchings, beatings, and sexual abuse, all starvation, illness, and injustice, are really aberrations from the way of eternity.

But days like this make me doubtful. After a week of reports about tortured Iraqi prisoners, the media turns our heads, hoping to re-engage us with pictures of Al-Qaida’s beheading of a man from West Chester, as though this gruesome tragedy will somehow justify our violent occupation. How long will we take an eye for an eye?

Meanwhile, a high school senior hangs himself in a school auditorium, the twenty-fourth Philadelphia public school student to die this year. And a woman I first met in a local prison is “back on the street” less than one month after her release. Because society has given her so few options, prostitution seems the best way up. I have heard that six months in a cell are enough to cause brain damage.

**I** find myself hungrier now than ever for those small moments of wonder that I would otherwise fail to notice. Hopeful moments don’t erase the terror of the world, but they do creep into it, like tree roots into a boulder, creating tiny, life-filled cracks.

My coworker Will discovers the small packet of “Dairy Fresh” he pulls from our refrigerator is, in fact, *non-dairy* creamer. We smile. The stress in the office eases one notch.

My cousin gets a bonus at work and decides to spend part of it on me: I get tulips delivered to my door after days of rainy weather.

A friend of mine tells me a story: A wonderful man we knew died unexpectedly Tuesday night in a hospital bed. On Wednesday morning, Josh went to work—standing on South Street, inviting passersby to give money to support his organization.

A young woman approached him. “How are you today?” he asked her.

“To be honest, I’m kind of sad.”

“I’m kind of sad too,” he replied.

“Really? Why are you sad?”

“I’m sad because a friend of mine died last night.” He looked at her. “Why are you sad?”

“I’m sad because my boyfriend doesn’t love me anymore.”

And right there on South Street, two complete strangers decided to give each other a hug. They stood in the middle of the sidewalk, holding each other, for a good minute. Later, she returned with a flower (“I thought you could use this”) and walked on. He never even asked her name.

I wonder if all the world could be like this: Engaged enough to notice and share our grief, selfless enough to comfort each other. I need these stories, lest I forget

that good and love still exist in the world.

I want to live deeply. I want to embrace my days rather than watch them march by unnoticed. In her poem “When Death Comes,” Mary Oliver writes, “When it’s over, I want to say: all my life / I was a bride married to amazement. / I was the bridegroom, taking the world into my arms.”

Like Oliver, at the end of the day, “I don’t want to end up simply having visited this world.”

—Deborah Good, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, works for The Other Side magazine ([www.theotherside.org](http://www.theotherside.org)) and is discovering glass bottles and fence posts as she digs up her backyard to plant grass. She can be reached at [deborah@theotherside.org](mailto:deborah@theotherside.org).

**Hopeful moments don’t erase the terror of the world, but they do creep into it. . . .**



# Saddling Up Our Bodies for Our Spirits to Gallop

Michael A. King

**W**hat if our spirits could gallop on our bodies? What a radical question, because many of us see our bodies as enemies of our spirits. That's how I was raised, and like many of us I still tend to fall into such thinking today.

There's some scriptural basis for it. Throughout his writings the Apostle Paul, for example, speaks frequently of the flesh, often in relation to its lusts and temptations, with flesh seeming to mean at least partly our bodily needs and urges.

And body is a problem in the story Jesus tells in Luke 12 of the rich man who thought he would pile up riches, then eat, drink, and be merry. But as soon as he got himself all set for the merriment, he died. So he was a fool, concludes Jesus. He was a fool because he put all his emphasis on making his body secure and then on pampering it, and what good was that when as soon as he got it he died?

Jesus' point is that if that's all we live for, in the end we'll find it's nothing. That's why he tells us not to be rich toward ourselves but to be rich toward God—and

why he says that where our treasure is, there will our heart be (Luke 12:34).

We also know from experience that our bodies easily and often betray us. They want things! They want all kinds of things. And when they want them, they want them now and they want them bad. So our bodies shout at us and whisper to us and plead with us and send tentacles of desire snaking out through us, telling us oh please, drink this, eat that, caress her, touch him, fall into this soft soft bed, get into this BMW with leather so tender it feels alive. Every minute of every day, there our bodies are, wanting this, aching for that, never shutting up, always craving craving craving.

No wonder Christians have from the start spent countless hours telling each other how bad their bodies are and how often they must be whipped into shape!

And my point isn't really to question that. My body wants things it shouldn't have, can't have. Yours does too. Addictions are the name we give to those desires we feel aching in our bones, made up of this tangled blend of wants of flesh and spirit, that make us ache to do things we deep down know will hurt us.

So let no one hear me suggesting body is not dangerous. Body is one of the most dangerous things God gave us. Body is like a nuclear reactor. Keep it under control, or get a chain reaction that blows up your whole life, all because what your body wanted was not what it could have and survive.

**B**ut even as I stress the danger of body, that's not where I want to end

up. I want to look at the flip side of the coin—to explore, as my title suggests, the possibility that our bodies can sometimes carry our spirits on the journey.

We need the teachings found in Ecclesiastes, which tells us again and again to eat, to drink, to be merry, to enjoy when we can the bodies we have been given in this life, amid all its pressures and stresses and woes, because these are enjoyments God himself has given us.

Listen, for example, to Ecclesiastes 2:24: "There is nothing better than for mortals to eat and drink, and find enjoyment in their toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, for apart from him who can eat. . . ?" (NRSV) Or 9:7: "Go eat your bread with enjoyment, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has long ago approved what you do."

And I want to suggest that Jesus is also right to have his rich fool quote from, precisely, the kind of view expressed in Ecclesiastes to suggest this: how shallow and transient such enjoyments are if they're all we have.

I want to work at this question of how our bodies carry our spirits forward because I'm convinced—from my experience, from watching the lives of others, and from what I see in the lives of those who are honest with me—that we live a whole lot more in and for our bodies and a whole lot less in and for our spirits than we like to admit.

Example: Suppose in preparing a sermon I am just plumb tired out. The last thing I want to do is work. I don't know what my congregants think

happens then. I half-hope they've been fooled by the image people sometimes have of pastors as set apart, more pious, far holier than thou, fooled into thinking that then I just pray for God to give me strength and lo, the inspiration comes! Sure, sometimes that's how it works. I do believe in the power of God and prayer and holy inspiration. But often that's just part of how I get through.

Here's the other part: I promise myself I'll at least confirm a Scripture and give our bulletin editor the sermon title before I let myself have a coffee and doughnut. Or I promise myself I'll do that much, then watch "CSI" on TV with my daughter Rachael. Or I'm really behind, so I'll force myself to work until 7:30 even though it's Friday night, but then I'll go out to the Sultan Indian Restaurant with family or friends.

When I do any of those things, in effect I'm putting a saddle on my body and inviting my spirit to ride it. My body isn't headed where my spirit is; it just wants its next pleasure. But if my body knows it's headed toward that pleasure, it doesn't seem to mind if my spirit rides it toward where my spirit needs and wants to go.

Where my spirit wants to go is toward God's treasure. My spirit wants to be rich toward God. My commitment to preach every Sunday is part of my spiritual journey, because in addition to the fact that pastoring is a job, I

accepted the call to it as part of what I understood God wanted me to do.

So I want my spirit to hold the reins, to tell the whole of me where it's supposed to go. But one incentive I use to take a few more steps on that journey is my body's craving for the joy of food or whatever else it happens to have fixed its hungry eyes on.

**My body isn't headed where my spirit is; it just wants its next pleasure. But if my body knows it's headed toward that pleasure, it doesn't seem to mind if my spirit rides it toward where my spirit needs and wants to go.**

I see two benefits to this approach. First, letting our spirits ride our bodies gives our bodies something useful, constructive, productive with which to busy themselves. Otherwise they can just get sloppy, lazy, addicted, not knowing what to do with themselves except root around as constantly and restlessly as robins grab at worms after the lawn is freshly mowed.

A second reason so many of us have such trouble doing something worthwhile with our bodies is our tendency to think anything they want is bad. If the only good body is a whipped body, a straitjacketed body, or maybe even a dead body, then what do we do when no matter how hard we try to whip the mangy thing into shape, it still ends up ruling us?

Many of us then take our bodies' pleasures into the closet. We not only hide them from others but often also even from ourselves. We sneak the midnight snack in all its various forms as surreptitiously as we can, hoping no one else will notice what we've

fallen into and even more that we ourselves won't really have to face just how much power our bodies do have.

But if we actually accept that our bodies can do good things for us, even carry our spirits where our spirits need to travel, then maybe we can be more honest about what our bodies need. And once we're honest, maybe we can celebrate, as Ecclesiastes so richly does, that as long as we respect the rules within which God asks us to use our bodies, enjoying them can be a wonderful thing. It's just plain the case that some of the greatest pleasure most of us experience much of the time is the joy our bodies give us.

Precisely because the joy can be so intense is why our bodies so often and quickly lead us astray. But if we accept the joy, if we savor it, if we cherish the

treasures of food and sex and wind on our skin and soft things to touch or be touched by as God's gifts, then maybe we can also see how, if we put it all together, some delightful things could happen. Then maybe we could learn more about how to saddle up our bodies and let our spirits ride. Then maybe we could go for great gallops through the glorious winds of this world and those endless physical joys and motivations with which God has so richly blessed us, and still be rich toward God.

—*Michael A. King, Telford, Pennsylvania, is editor, DreamSeeker Magazine, and pastor, Spring Mount (Pa.) Mennonite Church, where he preached a sermon on which this column is based.*

### *This Slow Disrobing*

I am writing a letter  
to a man I've never met.  
He has no face.  
I am telling him  
about the clothes  
I am taking off.  
With each letter,  
another layer  
falls at my feet.  
He does the same for me.  
Perhaps this way we will give each other faces.

—*Christine R. Wiebe*

# From Laramie to Baghdad

*Dreams of Peace in a World at War*

Hope Nisly

I am sitting by the railroad tracks at the edge of downtown Laramie, Wyoming, watching the colors of the evening sky spread to a hazy pink in the frigid dusk air. Previously, I've known Laramie only as the home of Matthew Shepherd before he was brutally murdered for being gay. I make a note to watch "The Laramie Project" when I get home to California again.

There is a footbridge across the tracks, and I notice the silhouette of the trestles. With my camera in hand, I leave the warmth of my car and Garrison Keillor's breathy monologue about the Passion Play in Lake Wobegon. It has not been a quiet week for me. As I soak in the desolate industrial beauty in the fading sunlight, my eye views it through the camera. It is the first calming action I have permitted myself in three weeks. When I run out of film, I head back to the car and Keillor.

I am in Laramie with my husband, Doug, and our 18-year-old son. Matthew enrolled in a technical school here, and we are settling him into his new life. I monitor each day's events, watching the three of us cycle through a range of emotions. With the aid of a city

map and phone book, we find our way around town to buy eating utensils, cans of SpaghettiOs, and other as-sorted necessities.

Earlier in the evening when we picked Matthew up for dinner, he told us that his new roommate informed him he hates gays and Mexicans, although blacks are okay, at least the ones he has had contact with.

"Then he told me," Matthew continued, "that he's a Christian. How can that be?"

Here in the town where Matthew Shepherd died there are many loving people, I am sure. But even the most loving among us find it difficult to love outside our own circles.

As I settle back into the warmth of my car my cell phone rings, shattering my momentary peacefulness. It is one of my brothers who often calls when I'm on a trip. I can sense immediately that this isn't a "just checking" call.

"Is Doug with you?" he asks.

I tell him no. Everything around me is dimming as the sunlight edges away. I hear a hum in my ears, a deadened roar as if I am under water.

With Wendell's question, a wave of fear hits me as I remember what has made the activities of settling our son into college life seem so normal and at the same time so incongruent. The U.S. has waged war on Iraq. We in turn are being bombarded with the images of Baghdad under siege.

**Here in the town where Matthew Shepherd died there are many loving people, I am sure. But even the most loving among us find it difficult to love outside our own circles.**

My parents' stories of conscientious objection during World War II permeated my growing-up years. I can almost repeat the stories word for word. This war, however, offers a twist to the family narrative. My brother Weldon is in Baghdad with Christian

Peacemaker Teams, there to "wage peace." Instinctively, I know this call is about him.

"Weldon was in an accident. He's in the hospital in Amman," Wendell tells me. "He has some broken bones. We think he's okay, but that's all we know."

I breathe again and begin to laugh.

Like everything else right now, my reaction has

a surreal edge. I remember my college T.A. explaining surrealism to our freshman English class: "If you open your oven and find one work boot sitting on a cake pan—that's surrealism," Russell taught us. My laughter is that boot.

I've been keeping a journal during Weldon's absences, but I have felt reluctant to record mundane activities in a world in which people have been torn from normal daily schedules. Today I write that Laramie is growing on me. I've always been a bit intrigued by this western town, although I'd be hard pressed to explain. I am simultaneously repulsed, an equally inexplicable reaction.

In August 1998, a mere two months before Matthew Shepherd's death, we stayed here overnight dur-

ing our move from Ithaca, New York, to Reedley, California. I cannot shake the eeriness of knowing that we were here and he was alive, preparing for another year of college.

I am drawn to Laramie's beauty and history, but tonight, I am uneasy with the underside of both the history and the location. From the broken treaties of the 1851 council at Fort Laramie to the torture of Matthew Shepherd, there have been many painful events. Laramie is much more than the sum of these negative events, but this too is part of its collective reality. Our world is filled with good people whose experiences have fostered a particular distrust and anger.

Over dinner Matthew tells us that he has already learned that the University of Wyoming students hate the WyoTech students and vice versa. It was one of the first things his new neighbors told him in their orientation for him, sandwiched between who throws good parties and where to buy a cheap DVD player.

Knowing college towns, I had warned Matthew about this. He had laughed and asked if I was saying that Laramie had gangs made of the technical school kids and college kids. I told him he could laugh, but I know a little about small college towns and about the human propensity to distinguish between "us" and "them." Tonight I think aloud about this tendency.

Matthew responds with his own observation about human nature. "A person alone can be good," he states, "but you put several people together and they always do bad things."

I tell him that his observation has a history. In 1895, Gustav LeBon published *The Crowd*, a sociological study of the behavior of groups. Crowds, according to LeBon, are always unconscious, intellectually inferior, and unreasonable. However, he adds, a crowd can as easily be heroic as criminal. It depends on "the nature of the suggestion to which the crowd is exposed."

I remind Matthew that it is also within groups that we can do our greatest good. We can come together like the Danes, nonviolently defying Hitler. We can build houses for Habitat for Humanity. Together, we can demand the right to vote or press for an end to war. For these things, we need collective action. Hopefully, we find community where "the nature of the suggestion" sets the pace for our best impulses.

At home, our peace rallies elicit a virulent opposition. We have been told to get out of our country and admonished to support the troops. One person informed us that God is not on the side of peace. But I also remember Rusty, who stepped out of the crowd to join our candlelight vigil.

"I came here," Rusty told us, "to show support for the troops and to tell you you're wrong. But instead I decided to join your circle because I believe you have a right to be here."

These days, when I find hope it surprises me.

While we eat it starts to snow, and for 20 minutes we can barely see across the street. Once again, we hear that Interstate 80 is closed between Laramie and Cheyenne. CNN in-

forms us that south of Baghdad, the wind is blowing the sand, obscuring the view and slowing the troops.

**D**oug and I leave Matt for a cup of hot tea at a Laramie coffeehouse before heading to Motel 6. Sitting there I try to put words to my anxiety. Looking at the people around me, I realize that there is a divide in our society that is, at least partly, an integral aspect of the U.S. war on Iraq. This seemingly insurmountable division shapes our faith, our views of the world, our relationships, and, ultimately, what we choose to believe about our war on Iraq.

In the coffeehouse there are anti-war posters on the message board and under the order counter. The décor is unique, but we could be along Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley or in Takoma Park, Maryland. The sounds, the conversations, the clothing, and even the smells are familiar. If I began a tirade against our current president, I am sure most people would nod.

Yet if I went to buy a drink just a few blocks away, I would have to order an American beer and sit under a flag with a notice that "these colors don't run." I would be afraid to get into a political discussion and out of my personal comfort zone. So I'll stay here, where I know what is acceptable, how much I am willing to risk.

The pro-/antiwar sentiments have roots in something I cannot comprehend. Understanding and communication come infrequently, and in slivers far too small.

**Looking at the people around me, I realize that there is a divide in our society that is, at least partly, an integral aspect of the U.S. war on Iraq.**

**I** am sitting in my room at Motel 6. It's 3 a.m. and I cannot sleep. As I worry, I send out a prayer for understanding; for Weldon's healing; and for the people of Iraq. I begin to write by the street light that shines through the window. The crack of light awakens Doug, who turns on the television and CNN babbles in the background.

A reporter is talking about the terrorist-style fighting by the Iraqi soldiers, calling it uncivilized. While he talks, the scrolling message at the bottom of the screen reports that the war is going as planned, then asks the viewers, "How long do you think the war will last? Cast your vote at [www.CNN.com](http://www.CNN.com)." Once again I think of the word *surreal*.

We live amid such complexity. Our history and our theology have created a mythology by which we live. I live by the stories of conscientious objection, others by stories of lives given for freedom. Phrases that seem meaningless to me have great importance for others.

My fears are running in high gear as the reality of the war comes to me through Weldon's eyes, through my knowledge that he was there. I move from questions to worry, disbelief, and tears. I waver between quiet reflection and intense rage.

I have tried to share Weldon's story but it is difficult. Reactions seem to be at one extreme or another, neither of

which fits what I feel. Some people find his actions naïve or worse. Others believe his sacrifice is so noble. I am angry at both responses, unable to speak about it with any of those commenting no matter how they respond.

I have never felt more alone. I cannot make sense of my own reactions and that, too, frustrates me. There is no way to make sense of war. I feel helpless in the face of my terror, my anger, and the ambiguities.

My thoughts have become an incessant and obnoxious staccato amid CNN's reports and my memory of slogans chanted in recent days. Human shields for Saddam. War is not the answer. Love it or leave it. No blood for oil. Freedom isn't free. Pray for peace. God bless America. God bless the Iraqis. The price of freedom is written in blood. Support the troops. We *do* support the troops—we want them home.

It builds to a crescendo of meaningless words. I don't expect to sleep tonight.

**T**here is, I suppose, a glimmer of hope even though I have not felt it lately. I heard it when Rusty spoke at

our vigil. I found it in the words of the Iraqi doctor who treated Weldon's wounds—then waved away thanks by saying, “We're all part of the same family.” I see it in anyone who, like my brother, is willing and able to face the chaos head on.

We want things to fit but they don't. We want answers to be simple and they aren't. We search for coherence when dissonance and ambiguity are the basis of everyday life. We declare our answers to be the right ones. It strains our goodwill to live together.

Maybe my own part (for now) is simply this: to listen more closely, to question lovingly, to support wholeheartedly, and to look for the ways to embrace the pain and step beyond my small circle of comfort. I do not expect it to be easy.

—*Hope Nisly is a librarian at Fresno Pacific University and editor of the California Mennonite Historical Bulletin. She and her husband, Doug Kliewer, live in relative peace and quiet in Reedley, California, while adjusting to an empty nest and trying to make sense of state and national politics.*



## “Eternal Sunshine”: The Sweet Torture of Memory

David Greiser

**R**eaders of this column know that I love the films of Charlie Kaufman (“Being John Malkovich,” “Adaptation,” “Confessions of a Dangerous Mind”). “Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind,” written by Kaufman and directed by music video director Michel Gondry, is, I believe, a worthy addition to Kaufman's growing collection of quirky, reality-doubting, mind-bending, endlessly imaginative movies.

“Sunshine” might even have qualified as groundbreaking, had it not been preceded by “Being John Malkovich” (to say nothing of the “Matrix” trilogy, in a more commercially successful vein). These films explore the admittedly surreal notion of entering another person's mind and altering the contents.

While the basic concept of “Eternal Sunshine”—a neurological procedure that erases unpleasant memories from the mind—is pure science fiction, the film itself plays more like a romantic comedy. To summarize: Joel Barish (played by a subdued Jim Carrey), a hangdog loner with profoundly low self-esteem,



meets wild child Clementine Kruczyski (played by Kool-Aid haired Kate Winslet) at the Barnes and Noble where Clementine works. Their brief affair starts off promisingly, but then sours and ends badly.

Clementine decides to have all of her memories of the boring Joel neurologically removed from her memory banks at Lacuna, Inc. The technical staff at Lacuna, played by a supporting cast of Tom Wilkinson (“In the Bedroom”), Kirsten Dunst, and Elijah Wood (who looks *nothing* like his Frodo Baggins in “Lord of the Rings”) harbor their own secretly erased romantic memories which are revealed in the course of the story.

When Joel learns that Clementine has had him “erased,” he determines to return the favor, only to have second thoughts as the procedure is being administered. Through his chemically induced haze, Joel manages to recall good memories along with the bad, and he determines to keep the good.

Much of the film shows Joel as he desperately tries to hide his good memories of Clementine in obscure corners of his memory (one good hiding spot is under the kitchen table in his childhood home). Since the procedure erases the most recent memories first, as most forms of dementia seem to work, we’re led to believe that we’re watching Joel and Clementine’s relationship unfold from the end to

the beginning. But alas, the human memory is not as reliable as videotape, and a long chase scene unfolds in a helter-skelter with little indication of whether the events Joel is remembering happened at the beginning, the middle, or the end of the affair.

**“Eternal Sunshine” is carried by a melancholy humor that wonders why we keep trying when relationships so often fail—and then answers its own question.**

**“E**ternal Sunshine” joins a growing company of films (most notably 1999’s “Memento”) that feature nonlinear narratives. Rather than passively watching the story unfold in sequence, the viewer is required actively to sort out the various parts of the narrative thread. I nearly drove myself to distraction trying to figure out which of

Joel’s memories occurred when in the relationship. I finally decided that the sequence of events mattered less than their emotional significance to Joel and Clementine.

Likewise, “Sunshine” takes its place alongside a surprising variety of recent films that explore the nature and functions of memory. Besides “Memento,” one thinks of recent films as various as “Finding Nemo,” “The Bourne Identity,” and “50 First Dates.” In its own way, each of these films makes the point that while specific memories fade, the energy and emotional imprint of love cannot so easily be erased.

When the trailers for “Eternal Sunshine” started appearing in theaters, many theatergoers mistakenly took it for a light farce with a sci-fi

hook thrown in for interest. Nothing could be further from the truth. “Eternal Sunshine” is carried by a melancholy humor that wonders why we keep trying when relationships so often fail—and then answers its own question.

—*Dave Greiser keeps his painful memories safely stored under the 1964 Phillies cap on his office shelf. When not in therapy, he pastors the Souder-ton (Pa.) Mennonite Church and teaches preaching at Eastern Baptist Seminary in Philadelphia.*

***I Was Only Looking, Or, So I Will Wait A Little Longer***

Last night we went to the hospital  
and I saw a doorway  
filled with orange and yellow light  
silence sounding  
and all the pain of a life leaving  
and I wanted to step into the doorway  
and lie on the bed  
But my sister begged me  
to come away.  
So I will wait a little longer.

—*Christine R. Wiebe*



# The Sins Jesus Judged

*Which Are They, Really?*

Randy Klassen

**R**ecently, at an art show, a kindly woman gave me a local news journal containing a pastor's column she was certain I would enjoy reading. Having written several such columns myself over the years, I was genuinely interested.

What I read, however, had an unhappy familiarity about it. It was a vitriolic denunciation of the sins of America that, the writer predicted, would soon lead to our destruction. By "destruction" he meant the end of our financial prosperity. By "sins" he was more specific. He named them. They were "pornography, immorality, adultery, sodomy, and divorce." If you watch some TV evangelists, you will hear roughly the same list of sins condemned.

I have often wondered why some preachers focus mainly on sexual sins. Are not the sins of greed, violence, bigotry, arrogance, and dishonesty—to name only a few—also matters of morality? What were the sins condemned by Jesus, our guide in areas of right and wrong?

Seeking an answer to this question, I quickly reread the four Gospels noting which sins Jesus de-

nounced. In Matthew and Mark I found that most of his judgments were directed against religious hypocrisy. I found over 20 such references. In second place came our Lord's warnings against greed and reliance upon material wealth. He also spoke against anger, unfaithfulness, failing to forgive, prayerlessness, misleading a child, judging others, and demanding miracles. I found only three references to sexual sins: lust, adultery, and divorce. Homosexuality is not even mentioned.

In Luke's Gospel, the sins most frequently mentioned are greed and dependence on material resources. Hypocrisy is a close third. Then faithlessness, pride, prayerlessness, and failure to forgive are mentioned.

Luke records only two specific judgments against sexual immorality.

In the Gospel of John, faith is emphasized, so the sin of failing to believe is underscored. Also condemned are the sins of pride, greed, hypocrisy, and judgmentalism. In John, as in Mark's Gospel, I found no reference to sexual sins.

**A**re we therefore to imply that sexual offenses are not as serious as other sins? Certainly not! Any sin that harms a sister or a brother is serious. But Jesus knew what was damaging and what was most needed. We can grasp something of his intent when we look at the conduct of many of the first Christians.

Church historians show that the moral standards of those early Christians were considerably more disciplined than those of their pagan neighbors. Some even moved toward complete asceticism. But those who married considered their unions to be monogamous relationships "until death did them part." Sexual purity, important as it was, seemed to be the fruit of a higher motivation.

The brilliant philosopher Tertullian, who became a Christian in the third century, defended his fellow believers in these revealing words: "They voluntarily contribute to the support of the destitute, and pay for their funeral expenses: to supply the needs of boys and girls lacking money and power, and of old people confined

to their homes. . . . We do not hesitate to share our earthly goods with one another . . . we hold everything in common but our spouses—[then he added sardonically] exactly reversing the practice in outside society."

This quotation was taken from Elaine Pagel's book *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent*, in which she notes many other wonderful features of the early church. They were a community of courage and love.

There it is! "How they love one another," commented a contemporary observer. When love is real, look what happens to the vices. Love leads to generosity, defeating selfishness, and greed. Love leads to integrity, defeating dishonesty and hypocrisy. Love

**What were the sins condemned by Jesus? . . . I found only three references to sexual sins: lust, adultery, and divorce. Homosexuality is not even mentioned.**

leads to acceptance of others, defeating judgmentalism and unforgiveness. Love leads to honoring male and female distinctions, thus defeating lust and deprecation of others. Love leads to respecting all of God's children, thus defeating prejudice, bigotry, and violence.

Is that not why Jesus made love first in importance? Remember his words: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:37-39 NRSV).

We need to keep our priorities where Jesus placed them. If we condemn only the sexually immoral, we may fail to recognize the immorality of exploiting the poor or perverting the truth to gain another dollar. It is all too easy to fall into the trap of the Pharisees who, proud of their supposed moral perfection, went about their religious duties while failing to

see and help the beaten and fallen traveler (Luke 10:29-37).

Maybe our biggest sin is not seeing, or not wanting to see, the needy people all around us. Are not these the neighbors Jesus calls us to love? Christlike love opens our eyes and our hands.

If Christ sets our priorities, our loudest judgments will fall on our failure to love, while our applause will go to the "good Samaritans." I believe such will also receive heaven's "well done."

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



## Letter from a New Wife

Laura Lehman Amstutz

**D**ear Karen,

I've cut my finger nearly once a week since I've been married. Perhaps they are trying to become the calloused farm wife fingers of my ancestors. Or perhaps they are just more used to the computer keyboard than the knife.

I have discovered that college did not prepare me for this life, in which my outlet for creative energy is food and cleaning, not books and writing. While college tried to instill in me a social consciousness, it did not prepare me for the reality of living that life.

In response to my social conscience, I have frequented a farmers market in my new town. I am fully aware of the plight of organic farmers trying to make it against the evil empire of the corporate farm. However, my class taught me nothing of shelling peas, which was required yesterday as a result of my market shopping. They did manage to make it out of the shell and into the bowl, but not without mishap and not as expertly as I imagined those early pioneer women doing it. The ones I used to read about in cheesy Christian romance novels. The beautiful, pious young woman sits on the porch shelling peas when the dash-

ingly handsome non-Christian man rides up on his horse, says something witty, and flashes an amazing smile. *Oh if only he would go to church*, the young woman thinks.

In my kitchen there were no horses, no dashing men, besides the ones on television. Not the soaps, but equally mind-numbing daytime shows. And the peas, as mentioned before, do not fall easily into the bowl from deft fingers, used to darning socks and killing chickens.

I have tried to convince my penny-conscious husband to shop at the only locally owned grocery store, but he scoffs at the idea of spending a dollar more for every item. So I go secretly when he's not around, and I don't tell him. It's like I'm doing something wrong. But alas, my socially responsible college did not arouse his conscience and even if it had tried, he'd be one of the ones who sat sullenly in the back or slept. The ones who needed the class to graduate and took the easiest prof they could find.

I've discovered I like cleaning the bathroom. It's something I know how to do thanks to my mom's training when I was 10. Every time I pull out the cleaning supplies and go into the bathroom, I remember the bathroom of our ranch-style home. Long, narrow, wide sink, large mirror. "Start from the top and work down," Mom would say, so we'd go at the mirror. I used to have to sit on the countertop to reach the top.

**I've discovered I like cleaning the bathroom. It's something I know how to do thanks to my mom's training when I was 10.**

I used to hate the toilet, but now it's sort of a comfort. It is one area of the house that shows real progress when it's cleaned. And thanks to the invention of Clorox wipes, I no longer have to think about the hideous number of germs collecting on the sponge every time I wipe the seat and bowl. Just wipe and throw away. What would my college say about that? Oh, the trials of a socially conscious germ-aphobe.

I always swore I'd never spend as much time in front of the ironing board as my mother. Thanks to my incredible lack of skill, I will never have to worry about that. Men's pants have utterly stunned me. Who knew they'd be so incredibly complicated to iron? My husband, Mr. Picky-Pants, as I have begun calling him in matters of ironing, has decided that for the sanity of his wife and the sanctity of his clothing, he will iron his own things.

However, some 1950s housewife part of me feels guilty about this. I spend all day at home; shouldn't I do this menial task? If we're talking about equality here, it's sort of like he's paying me to be his housekeeper and cook. At least that's what I tell myself when I feel lousy about not contributing financially to our marriage. But I'm a terrible housekeeper, and not worth the "money" he spends on me. Yet perhaps marriage is about more than an equal sharing of roles.

When I complain about my inability to do housekeeping duties, my loving, caring husband says, "It's good

for you." This could mean two things, neither of them particularly appealing. The first is that it is good for me to learn these tasks and do them well because that is a woman's "place," and all these years in school I have just been fooling around.

I have chosen to believe he has in mind the second, slightly less chauvinistic meaning, which is that it is good for me to have to do something I'm not good at. This is an attitude I do not particularly care for. But such is marriage, good with bad, and all that.

And so I must endure, until the autumn, when I can continue my academic pursuits, and pray that I will suddenly be too busy to care about pants and peas and toilets.

All good epistles end with admonition, so here it is, my dearest Karen. I do not advise you not to marry, for

that would be a foolish thing for me to say at this point. But my dear, I advise you to remember that while you may be a goddess among men in academia, in relationship to your husband's wrinkly pants, you are simply a woman without a clue.

Enjoy academia while you can, dear Karen, and remember, the crease is supposed to come from the pleat, not from beside it.

Love and Pokes,

Laura "The Housewife" Amstutz

—*Laura (Lehman) Amstutz from Kidron, Ohio, recently graduated from Bluffton College with a B.A. in Communication and a minor in writing. She is married to Brandon Amstutz and living in Harrisonburg, Virginia, where she is pursuing an M.Div. from Eastern Mennonite Seminary.*



# Posthumous Love Letter to Ms. Scott Dale

Glenn Lehman

*For much of the twentieth century, Scottdale, Pennsylvania, was the primary site for denominational publishing activities of what was called the Mennonite Church, until that stream of Mennonites merged with the General Conference Mennonite Church to become Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada. Partly because of the merger, publishing in Scottdale has been significantly downsized in recent years, some publications have ceased to exist, and a variety of publishing efforts have moved to other locations. As a result, continuity of print leadership has been interrupted. Writers search for new places in the structure, and readers have lost a subtext to give context.*

Dear Scottie,

Sorry I didn't write before you died. The last time I visited I had no idea.

It's no consolation, but other publishing houses fare no better. Sure, the independent presses make money. But denominational houses like you, who know their lineage and sacrifice for the heritage, suffer low sales. Your friend Augsburg Fortress laid off 52

employees in 2001. The Disciples and the Presbyterians did no better at the cash register.

Did you know, Scottie, that there were always young people hanging on to your linotype's every jot and tittle? For myself, discovering and bonding with you was one of my pivotal religious formations.

Do you remember my first visit? It was the late 1950s. I was on a field trip with other sixth-graders from the camp down the road. Do you remember my first letter to you, almost 50 years ago? I wrote to the kids paper hoping for a pen pal.

Do you remember my first poem, sent to you in 1961? It came after a long youthful struggle in my soul. Passions of the flesh resisted dictates of the Almighty. On my knees my young soul finally said yes to becoming a missionary doctor to Africa. The Almighty promptly said that had been just a test, to see if I was willing. Never so glad to be let off the hook, I grabbed a pencil and scribbled, "The world is ablaze with Autumn, ablaze with beauty divine . . ." And off went my first poem to you, Scottie.

A few weeks later you sent a check for \$2.50, and the words appeared on the front page of the youth periodical. I knew my future wife (whom God, according to my mentors, had already chosen) would be reading it, beginning her formation as my companion.

Then one of your swains, young Editor Roth, elicited some fiction from my imagination. A few daring short stories rolled off your presses.

And the checks got bigger. Remember what \$15 felt like in 1967! Early 1970s I would stop on my way back East to hang out at the pads of friends living in your menagerie. While Jim and Susie cooked up a crockpot of stew, splashed with a little *verboten* wine, below, for all we knew, some church patriarch was editing the next volume of the denominational encyclopedia.

As any friendship goes, Scottie, I matured and noticed that we were not perfectly matched. What a surprise! But we loved nonetheless, right? I memorized your phone number. I knew your zip (15683) as soon as it came out in 1963. You were much older. I was born when Daniel Kauffman was your chief editor. I learned to read when his successor, Paul Erb, reigned. I thought the world would never be the same when John Drescher took up the mantel. Dan Hertzler assumed the role as I was honing my journalistic skills.

How ironic that you who taught me survival skills are now the one to go! You taught me how to weather the dress issues. In the darkroom you showed me how to doctor photos with too much jewelry or too little skirt. You showed me how to find a path through such issues as Vietnam and civil rights. You've seen them all—the zealots on the right and left. Although you loved the printed word, you knew there was yet more truth to break out of the Word.

But Scottie, it never occurred to me that you would not live forever. At

**Scottie, it never occurred to me that you would not live forever.**

least, not outlive me. Did the caregivers try everything? You at least could have told me when you thought the end was coming. But I had to read of your demise in a highly designed new magazine, whose own staff has been cut back.

Now I'm lost without you. Oh, I go online and feel omniscient. I know you've just moved on to a better place in cyberspace. But I mourn the terra firma of our courtship. I don't want to fall in literary love again.

No sooner did you go into a coma than a new committee started to do the numbers. I hate to bring this up, old girl, but apparently you had not paid all your bills. But what do we expect of dowagers prodigal in love! Your elder statesmen and women, those minds, those fingers, those backs, those hearts who now need some retirement, got a short deal. Writers like me, without whose material you couldn't have published anything except the editorial page, fared no better, I dare say.

Everything changes these days. When you and I were young, Scottie, I'll never forget the passion with which you, like a Joan of Arc, stood up for good journalism and plain old lin-

ear truth. I'll always cherish the twinkle in your eye, the coterie of free spirits you attracted with your charms, the hint of naughty freedom in the air.

Each great civilization has a literary set. You, Scottie, were my Fleet Street, my New York Publishers Row. You were my shining city on a hill. You, the rustle of fresh paper and ink. A young person could gaze up at you and say, "I could spend my whole life there and not explore it all."

Was there no funeral? No requiem? No proper obituary? Scottie, we will always have the memory between us. I'm getting older. Love goes deeper and stays longer, but it comes slower.

Love, Glenn

—*Glenn Lehman is a writer from Leola, Pennsylvania, and loyal reader of much of the former Mennonite Publishing House output. He also earns a living in music and is the director of Harmonies Workshop. He lives with his wife and two children in an 1825 stone house with high-speed Internet, surrounded by Belgian horses. His denominational publishing house by birth and by choice was located in Scottsdale, Pennsylvania.*



## Seeing with Other Eyes

*A Reflection on the Hemingway Message*

Daniel Hertzler

I bought a copy of Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (Scribners, 1926, 1970) in a secondhand store. I read it and asked myself, *Is this all there is?* It seemed that Hemingway was saying very little although he said it well. Later I decided to review Hemingway's works and so I read it again, this time in *The Hemingway Reader* (Scribner's, 1953) with a foreword and introductions by Charles Poore.

My attention was called to the two quotations at the beginning of the book. One is from Gertrude Stein, "You are all a lost generation." The other is Ecclesiastes 1:4-7, a reflection on life's futility from which the book's title comes. So it is suggested that Hemingway's novel intended to represent the dilemma of young people disillusioned by World War I savagery. But the lesson, if intended, was lost on many, for "All over America and in the world at large young men and women took uninvited guidance from it, though Hemingway viewed this development moodily. . . ."

"The heart of the story . . . is the tragedy of limited responsibility in the face of limitless temptation" (Poore, 88).



The characters in this story who are found to be in Paris seem to spend an inordinate amount of time in restaurants and bars eating and drinking and drinking and drinking, sometimes getting drunk. There is endless conversation and sometimes, by implication, fornication. Considerable space in the story is taken up by a trout fishing expedition in Spain and even more time by a bullfighting festival.

A femme fatale defeats a series of “lovers” and in the end is left with the narrator; their relationship, which has been casual throughout the story, now appears to be uncertain. Hemingway’s own description of the theme of the book was “Promiscuity—no solution” (Carlos Baker, *Ernest Hemingway. A Life Story*, Scribner’s, 1969).

Regardless of what he said about the theme, Hemingway’s life was to become much like that of his characters. He had been a correspondent in Paris and had spent considerable time with bullfights in Spain. One of the distinctive features of all his fiction is a clear and detailed description of places. He had an eye for geography.

**R**aised by pious middle-class Protestants in Oak Park, Illinois, he rejected their morality and developed his own pragmatic ethical perspective. Married four times (which did not prevent additional sexual assignments), he proposed to the fourth wife that they not follow her parents’ Christian Science or his own Congregational tradition “as well as the various Puritanical misconceptions about human conduct. The substitute he proposed was hedonistic and sentimentally human-

istic. He and Mary must evolve their own rules of behavior, said he, believing in each other” (Baker, 450).

Hemingway’s father was a physician, his mother a musician. The family had a Michigan vacation home. One thing Ernest accepted from his father was the love for hunting and fishing he would pursue throughout his life. The family style was rigid. His father “forbade all recreational activity on the Lord’s Day—no play with friends, no games, no concerts. . . . Major infractions of the rules were swiftly punished with a razor strop . . . followed by injunctions to kneel and ask God’s forgiveness. Grace [his mother] was on the whole a good deal more permissive” (Baker, 9).

As an adult, however, Ernest was more critical of his mother than his father. “He frankly condemned his mother as a domineering shrew who had driven his father to suicide” (Baker, 452).

Hemingway’s life, as described by Baker, began in 1899 and ended in 1961 when he committed suicide. After serving briefly as a newspaper reporter, he went to Italy during World War I as a Red Cross ambulance driver, where he was wounded by an Austrian shell.

After the war he became a correspondent in Paris, where he evidently gathered material for *The Sun Also Rises*. He became a correspondent in Spain during the Spanish Civil War. Later he went to England and then to Europe during World War II. All of these experiences became grist for his fiction writing.

Near the end of his life, Hemingway showed unmistakable signs of mental illness and was twice sent to the Mayo Clinic, where he was treated with electric shocks. But according to Michael Reynolds, mental instability had affected Hemingway through adulthood “ever since 1919 when he returned from World War I: when euphoric nothing could daunt him; when bottomed out he was increasingly paranoid, moody and implacable” (*Hemingway. The Final Years*, 235-236).

**T**wenty-six books by Hemingway are listed in Baker’s biography. But it appears to me that the following four are his more notable works: *The Sun Also Rises* (1926); *A Farewell to Arms* (1929); *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940) and *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952). For the last of these he received the Pulitzer Prize.

I have summarized above the plot of *The Sun Also Rises* with a lesson Hemingway himself evidently did not follow. Baker reports that Hemingway “boasted that he had bedded every woman he had ever wanted and some that he hadn’t” (465). *A Farewell to Arms* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* are war stories each with a romantic ingredient. As Baker comments regarding a later novel, “The background, as always, was love and death. In the foreground stood the embattled hero” (475). “War,” Hemingway said, “was the best subject of all. It offered maximum material combined with maximum action” (Baker, 161).

In the former of these two war stories, the protagonist is an ambulance driver and an officer in the Italian army as Hemingway had been. He is injured, as Hemingway was, gets sent to a hospital where a friendly and available nurse works the night shift and provides him with more than the usual medical attention. After convalescing he gets back to the front, participates in a retreat, and as an officer is accused of deserting his men. Such deserters are being shot, but he avoids it by diving into a river, running away, catching a ride on a slow-moving military freight train, and finding his way back to the nurse.

But he must run farther because the police are after him. So he and the nurse escape to Switzerland by rowing across a lake during the night. Here they find pleasant living conditions and in due time her baby comes, but she dies in childbirth. “Love and death,” as Baker observes.

*For Whom the Bell Tolls* is set in the Spanish Civil War. The direct action in this 500-page book takes place within 68 hours, although there are a number of flashbacks to fill in background. The hero, Robert Jordan, is an American who has come to Spain to fight on the side of the Republicans in opposition to the Fascists. Much of the interaction takes place in a mountain cave. Here with what appears to be a group of irregular troops are two women:

**Near the end of his life, Hemingway showed unmistakable signs of mental illness and was twice sent to the Mayo Clinic, where he was treated with electric shocks.**



one a hardheaded middle-aged mama and the other one young, nubile, and available to Robert Jordan.

The battle is not successful, and the survivors are retreating when Robert Jordan's horse stumbles and Jordan's leg is broken. He cannot continue with the group and expects to die because the enemies are in hot pursuit. But it is implied that before he dies he will at least be able to kill Lieutenant Berrendo.

*The Old Man and the Sea* is a tale of a Cuban fisherman who caught and subdued a prize marlin after a long struggle which took his boat far out to sea. When he finally has captured the fish, it is too large and heavy for him to lift into the boat, so he lashes it to the side and sets sail for the shore. The fish is attacked by sharks and the old man kills the sharks one after the other, but as he nears the shore, the fish has been half eaten by sharks.

At the end the old man finds himself talking to the fish. "Half fish," he said. "Fish that you were. I am sorry that I went too far out. I ruined us both. But we have killed many sharks, you and I, and ruined many others. How many did you ever kill, old fish? You do not have that spear on your head for nothing."

It is a Hemingway ending. And there's one last word. "Fight them," he said. "I'll fight them until I die" (Poore, 651-652).

**W**hat about Hemingway and his writing justifies our attention after

this passage of time? In *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge, 1961) C. S. Lewis asked why read literature. "The nearest I have yet got to an answer," he said, "is that we seek an enlargement of our being. We want to be more than ourselves. . . . We want to see with other eyes, to imagine with other imaginations, to feel with other hearts, as well as our own" (137).

Can reading Hemingway do this for us? Certainly it can let us "see with other eyes." At the end of the volume in which he describes Hemingway's decline, Reynolds observes, "Ernest Hemingway was the embodiment of America's promise. . . . Before he burned out, he lived constantly on the edge of the American experience. In the process, he fathered sons, wrote books, influenced friends, and won every prize available as a writer" (360).

As he came to his 60s, not only was Hemingway's mental capacity failing but his body was also worn out. The story of his life itself serves as a cautionary tale for those who can hear it.

So this is the message of Hemingway: Life is hard, much of it is banal, and sooner or later we die. His citing of a text from Ecclesiastes in *The Sun Also Rises* indicates that he had already noticed this early in his career. Do we need to read Hemingway to comprehend this lesson? Maybe not, but it could help.

The efforts at religious education by his parents and the Congregational Christian Church seem to have gone

**So this is the message of Hemingway: Life is hard, much of it is banal, and sooner or later we die.**

largely awry. Baker observes that Hemingway, "turning to and away from the Church, arriving finally at a kind of intellectualized humanism while protesting that he missed the ghostly comforts of institutionalized religion as a man who is cold and wet misses the consolations of good whiskey" (viii).

His father was troubled by Hemingway's portrayal of the underside of life. In response to *In Our Time*, one of the early novels, he wrote, "The brutal you have surely shown the world. Look for the joyous, uplifting and optimistic and spiritual in character" (Baker, 160). From what I have noted above about his father's rigid method of child-raising, it appears that his father was late with his suggestion.

I have found myself reflecting on the question of why the compilers of the Hebrew Bible included the sordid tales of sexual promiscuity and violence which appear in Judges 19-21. If such material appeared in our mass media, citizens would be aroused. Yet we make the Bible available to our children and urge them to read it.

It appears the compilers wanted readers to know how badly it went when "there was no king in Israel; all

the people did what was right in their own eyes" (Judg. 21:25 NRSV). As those of us who have read farther know, they did get a king, but this did not solve all of their problems. Yet the story leads eventually to Jesus, crucified as King of the Jews, a different kind of king from what many had expected. This part of the story seems not to have impressed Hemingway.

Hemingway's characters had to deal with the cold, hard realities of life and death. Like them, he himself had edged up toward death several times, and when his body no longer served him, he ended his life. As Reynolds observes, "Always looking for others to blame for his problems and quandaries, Ernest usually found women to be the responsible party" (25).

But he could craft a story and he turned them out one after the other. Even as we reject the primitive and pagan morals of Hemingway's characters, we may take note of their courage in the face of violence. Love and death are important realities.

—Daniel Hertzler, *Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, a longtime editor and writer, contributes a monthly column to the Daily Courier (Connellsville, Pa.)*.



### Lament

I'd never seen him cry before—  
my father.  
But there  
encircled by his brothers and sisters,  
he sobbed  
like a baby.

Grandpa Shem took me aside  
And told me how he sat with my father's mother.  
Grandpa knew she was crossing over.  
He held her hand and whispered,  
"Salome, Salome."

Later, at the funeral,  
As he watched the casket descend into the earth  
A lone tear rolled down grandpa's cheek.

In winter  
We sat with my mother  
As she breathed her last breaths—  
Encircled by her sister, two children  
And my father—  
We called out our good-byes,  
as we watched her leave.

And now in summer,  
I still grieve.  
Tears come quickly, as memories return.

As generation to generation flows  
I grieve in knowing  
that the next children to lose a mother  
Will be my own.

—*Joyce Peachey Lind is a mother, teacher, and musician who lives in Harrisonburg, Virginia. She is pursuing an M.A.T. in Early Childhood Education at James Madison University.*

## Sharp

Noël R. King

**J**oe's vision had never been outstanding, but at least it was serviceable. He had gotten contacts when he was 22 years old, and he had worn them ever since. Now in his early 40s, he rarely thought about his contacts except when he had to take them in or out between the major events of his life, such as going to bed at night and getting back up in the morning.

One spring day, as he was sitting out on his back porch, staring at the river so luckily right behind his house (he loved rivers), it seemed an exceptionally glorious day, and he rejoiced. The more he sat there, the more he realized the day was deliciously clear and his vision marvelously sharp.

"That's what spring is good for," Joe said to nobody in particular, because his wife wasn't home at the moment. "You can really see for once."

The sunset finally slid across the river to Joe's back porch about five hours later, and he was still sitting there. Oh, he had gone inside every couple of hours to get another soda or to answer the phone and stuff like that, but his day had pretty much been spent right there, out on that porch.

"Ain't that somethin' . . .," Joe muttered, mostly under his breath. He stretched his arms high above his head, feeling the muscles ripple pleasingly all the way

down his back. “. . . what a good clear day can do for you.”

The next day Joe went back out on his porch and sat there all day. The next day he sent his glasses to a remote village in Africa. The next day he rested from doing all that work. The next day he threw away his contacts, put on his hiking boots, and sat on his porch all day once again, resting one more time.

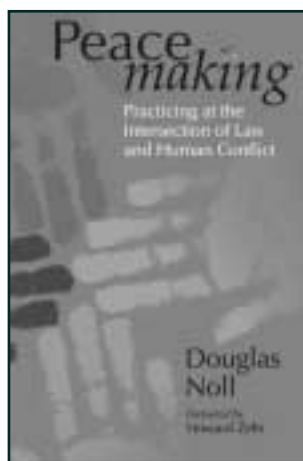
“I do believe I am ready now,” he said the next morning as he stepped out the door, this time at last onto his front porch. “Ain’t that somethin’.”

—*As circumstances warrant, through her Turquoise Pen column Noël R. King, Reston, Virginia, reports on strange and wonderful things, including what can happen when vision sharpens.*



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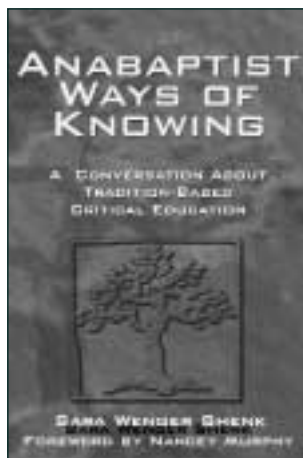
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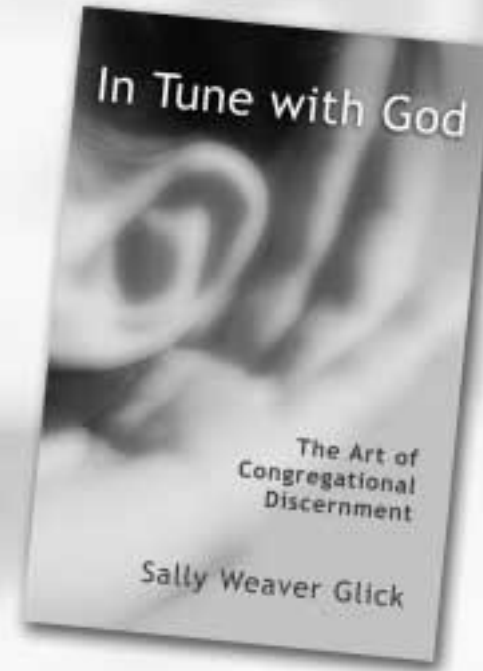
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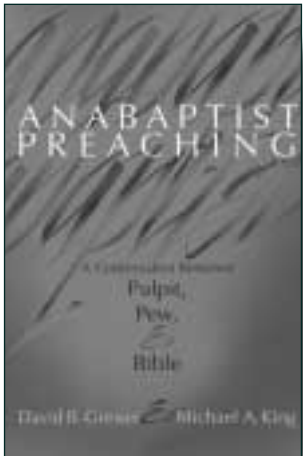
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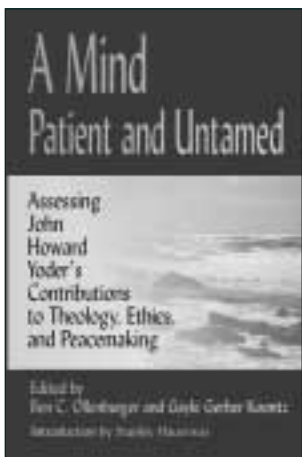
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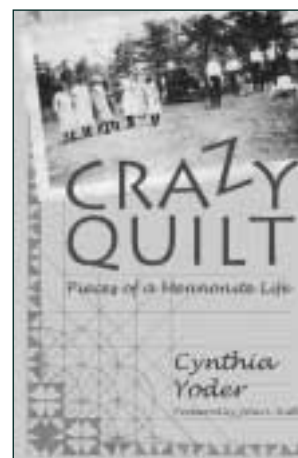
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*God's Grace*

It's like this:

It's your turn to do dishes  
and you've let them pile up  
over the table and the stove  
and the chairs and the top of the refrigerator,  
and your roommate, who hates doing dishes,  
having nothing better to do  
out of love for you  
washes every last one.

—*Christine R. Wiebe*