

DreamSeeker Magazine

Voices from the Soul



Lot's Wife

Suzanne Ehst

Finding Hope Even in the Real World

Jody Fernando

In Those Days at Camp Tel Hai

Mel Leaman

Beneath the Skyline

Mattresses and Gardens

Deborah Good

Kingsview

Seeing the Entire Trip

Michael A. King

The Task for Third Agers: Jubilee/Shalom

Milo D. Stahl

Hanging Out Wash as Spiritual Experience

Linda Martin

and much more

Summer 2006

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Editorial: Exploring the Tent Pitched Among Us

When John 1:14 says that “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth,” the verb translated “dwelt” could also be rendered, I was inspired to learn, along the lines of “pitched his tent.” God through Jesus pitched and pitches his tent among us, dwelling right here with us in the enfleshed nitty-gritties of our real lives.

Exploring aspects of what that looks like is one thing the authors of this issue of *DreamSeeker Magazine* might be viewed as doing. Suzanne Ehst strikes me as doing this when she turns becoming a pillar of salt into evidence of a compassion not so different from what we believe that tent-dweller in the end expressed on his cross.

Jody Fernando explores the tent pitched among us when she seeks to experience God’s presence not simply in disembodied faith but amid the struggles and pains of real life, including marriage when it turns out to involve more than easy romance. Mel Leaman looks for the larger meanings in his flesh-and-blood relationship, hurts and joys included, with his brother. Deborah Good is leading us near the tent when she asks how broken neighborhoods might be transformed into art and an old mattress into a large and comforting hand.

Although I wasn’t thinking of the tent when I wrote it, my own column can be understood to suggest that often older people are particularly able to discern where in life’s rough terrain

the tent is to be found. And it was a pleasure to have in hand at precisely the right time to illustrate this an article from older author Milo D. Stahl (my boss in the 1970s when I was a college work-study student). Stahl invites us to dream not of a comfortable

retirement but rather to plan for an active old age of tent-living with Christ in which we embody and work for *shalom* and Jubilee.

Linda Martin shows how that down-to-earth activity, hanging wash, can draw us toward the tent. Noël King doesn’t exactly coax us near the

tent, but maybe we still learn something about it through entering her parable, which smashes our spirituality head-on into solid boulders. David Greiser’s film review might be viewed as looking at life outside the tent.

In book reviews on such topics as Fanny Crosby as well as how Christians and others have handled and mishandled land, Marlin Jeschke and Daniel Hertzler show us realities both earth-bound and also hinting at the tent. In their exchange of views regarding “Brokeback Mountain,” David Greiser and Forrest Moyer wrestle with how you both live in the tent and redemptively engage gay love. And poet Rebecca Rossiter spies the tent in simple suppers, alfalfa, and quiet Mennonites wanting to let the music out.

—Michael A. King

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As reported in DSM Spring 2006, responses to the DSM Winter 2006 special issue on homosexuality will largely be incorporated into an expanded book-length version of that Winter 2006 conversation. And Forrest Moyer's interactions with Winter 2006 will appear in that book. But Moyer's interchange with Dave Greiser, above, which began with a letter to the editors, appears here because it engages a regular column by Greiser rather than one of the articles in the special issue.

Dear Editors:

This is a response to David Greiser's review of "Brokeback Mountain" (*DreamSeeker Magazine*, Spring 2006). I have not seen the film, as I am in recovery from homosexual orientation, and I could tell when the film first came out that it would be a negative influence on my recovery. The message from the world—that gay love is normal and healthy—is something that I always need to protect my mind and heart from.

However, I have been concerned about "Brokeback's" content and influence on society. Thus I've read enough reviews of the film to understand what its content and message is.

In his review, Greiser uses the inability of Ennis and Jack to understand their love and relationship as an analogy for the inability of the Mennonite church to come together around the issue of homosexuality. I hear him as saying that while he hopes "we can all be together" in the end, sadly we are like two gay lovers who

don't understand that they can and should be together.

If this is indeed Greiser's meaning, I question it strongly. Using this story to make such an analogy distracts from the more important issue of the godlessness of Jack and Ennis's experience. Earlier in his review, Greiser describes the severe immorality and

What would repentance and redemption have looked like in the story of "Brokeback Mountain"?

brokenness of Jack and Ennis's personal and family lives, but he says nothing about the absence of God's love and redemption. Of course, God is absent from most Hollywood films, but we as Christians must carry the reality of God into every experience and conversation we have.

What would repentance and redemption have looked like in the story of "Brokeback Mountain"? Could the men not have experienced forgiveness and healing and learned to love their wives in healthy ways and to love other men as brothers? Could they not have come to the end of their lives thanking God for bringing them through the fire of temptation and giving them strength to obey God and love themselves and others appropriately?

The absence of spiritual realities undermines any useful analogy between the "Brokeback" gay lovers and the Mennonite church. Again, I have not seen the film and cannot see it, but I was disappointed with Greiser's avoidance of moral and spiritual issues and his attempt at what seems to me like an inaccurate comparison.

—Forrest Moyer, Palm, Pennsylvania

Dear Forrest:

Thanks for your careful and thoughtful response to my review. It's good to know *somebody* reads them!

You've made some good points and probably pointed out several areas where my intentions could have been clearer.

As an overall response, let me state that I was *not* attempting to say that if Mennonites could just forget their differences over this issue and love each other, all would be well. What struck me in the film, even more than the themes of homosexuality, forbidden love, and prejudice, was the theme of failed communication.

In the film, one character is stoic, emotionally clamped down and inarticulate. The other yearns for his friend's love but is not able to communicate that feeling successfully. Both men fail to communicate with their wives and families, to the point that their marriages die.

In the context of the prior *DreamSeeker Magazine* issue on homosexuality and conversation in the church (Winter 2006), my point was that, in a way similar to the muted conversations in "Brokeback," the Mennonite church has failed in its attempts to talk about this issue, leading (in Franconia Conference at least, where I have pastored at Souderton Mennonite Church) to a place where we can hardly raise the issue anymore lest a fight break out.

We have tried to talk intellectually about it; we have hardly been able to address the feelings that erupt when the subject is on the table. There

seems to be a level of sensitivity and a strength of feeling around this topic that goes beyond the bounds of rationality—much deeper than earlier conflicts over women in ministry, for example. The Winter 2006 issue of *DreamSeeker* was all about the intellectual stalemate; I was wanting comment on the emotional stalemate, using the movie as metaphor.

I don't know if this makes it clearer or not. I appreciate your response, and want to be pastorally as well as journalistically sensitive in my dealing with both the subject, and with those like you who are personally affected. I hope I have been so.

—David Greiser,
Souderton, Pennsylvania

Dear Dave:

I appreciate your thoughtful consideration of my response to your review of "Brokeback Mountain."

Thanks for clarifying your intentions in using the relationships in "Brokeback" as a metaphor for failed communication in the church. It was helpful to understand that you were responding primarily to the issue of conversation.

I think you are absolutely right that it is disappointing that we find it so difficult to converse about homosexuality in our churches. I would go further and suggest that we are failing to talk effectively about sex and sexuality in general in the church and in the Christian family.

Sex is part of who we are as humans—somewhat like fire. We do not hesitate to teach our children about fire—its uses and abuses, its beauty,

warmth, and helpfulness, as well as its fearful ability to burn, kill, and destroy when uncontained or used inappropriately. When dealing with the appropriate use of fire, neither avoiding the conversation nor all-out fighting is a satisfactory response.

Even so, when discussing appropriate and healthy sex, the church, I think, cannot afford to avoid the conversation or fight about it. We must develop the ability to have civil, even-

handed, intellectually informed, and spiritually realistic conversations about sex, healthy sex, gay and lesbian sex, immoral sex, predatory sex, etc. There is no necessity to avoid this conversation or to blow our tops over it. In fact, it seems clear that either of these responses has negative effects on the purity and ministry of the church.

Again, thanks for listening so sensitively to my thoughts.

—Forrest Moyer



Letters to DreamSeeker Magazine are encouraged. We also welcome extended responses (max. 400 words) as well as occasional conversations such as published above.

Lot's Wife

Suzanne Ehst

In summer 2004, Southside Fellowship, a Mennonite congregation in Elkhart, Indiana, held a six-week worship series in the Jewish tradition of Midrash. Six women, including Suzanne Ehst, were invited to select a female character from the Bible and, with a nod to this Jewish tradition, creatively “fill in ‘gaps’ found in the [story].” Midrash, according to Rabbi Isaac Waldman, “is a kind of poetry that demands that we explore every shade of God’s intended meaning.”

This is an odd story.

This is the story of Lot's wife, whose name we don't know, whose voice we never hear, whose fairytale-like transformation into a pillar of salt gets but one verse, and whose death evokes no tears.

It's also an unfair story, if you consider that the night before the family fled Sodom, Lot offered their two daughters to a lustful mob so they'd leave the male guests alone, saying of the daughters, “Do with them what you will.”

It's unfair when you consider that after they've fled Sodom, the daughters get their father drunk and sleep with him, yet Lot, for all his incest and disloyalty, begets tribes, and Lot's wife, for her glance, is turned into a pillar of salt. How's that for justice?

The story of Lot's wife is a difficult story. So why, when Southside Fellowship invited me to create Midrash around *any* biblical female character, did I choose this one? Simple. I would have looked back too.

This was not always a difficult story. When I was a child, it seemed that every Bible story had one of two possible interpretations. The message was either *do* be like this person or *don't* be like this person.

Lot's wife, of course, was one you were *not* supposed to be like. She was our lesson in the dangers of defiance, a picture to us children, who were finding our wills, of a God who will not accept the slightest bit of back talk. If God tells you—through your husband—to pack your bags in the middle of the night, leaving behind nearly everything that constitutes home for you, you do it.

You leave. You don't question the absurdity of this command. You don't linger as you close the front door. You don't even turn around for one last glance as your car pulls out of the drive, because even that suggests you are not in total submission to God's will for your life.

As a child, the message was clear: "*Don't* be like Lot's wife."

But any story can seem clearcut when given just a single verse. The Jewish tradition of Midrash seems an invitation to honor the humanity of all the characters in the Bible, especially those women who dwell so

silently as supporting actresses in their husbands' stories.

So imagine with me the *life* of Lot's wife that's been lost beneath the "lesson" of the pillar of salt. Because all we really know about her centers on her moment of leaving home. Imagine with me the before—imagine her building the home.

I imagine that as young idealists Lot and his wife decide to make their home somewhere in the bad part of town. They settle in the neighborhood with graffiti on the walls and crack vials nestled in scruffy grass by the sidewalk, the part of town where you're cautioned never to go out at night without your pepper spray.

But the two buy a neglected townhouse because the property is cheap, and they have a vision of how they'll pour the money they've saved on the purchase into renovating the place just as they like it. Plus, she thinks, she'll try to be a peaceful presence among her neighbors—not preaching the Word but living it, building relationships, extending compassion.

So they make the plunge. She spends the first few weeks scrubbing the neglected front porch and painting the trim a rich brown-red to set off the stone front. She plants bold pansies in the flower boxes, fixes the plumbing, knocks out a wall so the dining room will flow into the kitchen, and hangs the photos of the kids, ascending by age, up the stairs.

And she sits on the front porch steps. She waves at the neighborhood kids as they run home from school, their backpacks flying out behind them like kites. She strikes up conversation with the lonely woman next door she's never not seen in curlers. She even makes a point of walking to the market via the corner where the rumored dealers hang out, and after a few weeks she greets them by name.

Even though the news seems to report only the latest arrests in her neighborhood, this woman has learned that to build relationships with people is to make it impossible to give them that one-dimensional label of *evil*. No person, no town, no nation is unequivocally good or evil. Rather, if you truly love your neighbor as yourself, you start to find your neighbors strangely similar to yourself—a package of vices coupled with the urge to love and be loved, all of us searching to find a foothold in the complex world, and wanting to be seen, to be looked at with that glance that acknowledges us into existence.

But the kids start to grow up. And after that near-rape of their two daughters, Lot and his wife have late-night conversations at the kitchen table. They speak in hushed tones about this tension between their obligation to the safety of their children and their sense of purpose in the city. Yet when Lot's offered a pastorate in a nearby suburban congregation, he sees it as a sign from God. They decide to get out.

So they call the realtor and list the house. They box Grandma's china

and the collection of books, load the furniture into the U-haul. . . . But Lot's wife can't pack the flower boxes, or tea time with the neighbor on the front porch, or the kitchen wall where she marked the kids' heights on their birthdays. She can't pack that odd feeling that in those passing conversations with these have-nots, something holy was exchanged, something that transcended their idle chatter about the weather.

As they pull away from the curb, she knows she'll likely never return. If she does, it won't be her *home*. There's a loss here. She looks back.

Who among us wouldn't take a glance in the rearview mirror at least, or turn ourselves a full 180 for that final look? This is what you do when you have come to love something.

This story connects with the prophet Jeremiah's words to the Israelites in exile: "Seek the peace of the city where I have sent you into exile and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its shalom you will find your shalom" (Jer. 29:7, NRSV as paraphrased in Friesen, below).

Anabaptist theologian Duane Friesen sees this verse as a model for how Western Christians might relate to mainstream culture. He's not satisfied with the two dominant models of church-culture relationship he's found in history and theology. He critiques the "separatist" model that says, "We believers will pitch our tents over here in this isolated field so as not to be tempted or tainted by The World." This model takes away our transformative voice.

The story of Lot's wife is a difficult one. So why . . . did I choose this one? Simple. I would have looked back too.

Nor does Friesen like the “Constantinian model” that ties the church so tightly to the dominant institutions of society that God inevitably becomes a bully pulpit. Here he’s the guy on whose back we stand in our selfish quest to reach the top.

The story of the Israelites in Babylon, says Friesen, is a better model. It calls us to recognize that no earthly dwelling is a permanent home or deserves our ultimate allegiance; however, it also calls us to invest ourselves in the well-being of our cities, our earth, our neighbors, and our country (*Artists, Citizens, Philosophers*, Herald Press, 2000).

In this “exile” model, we are called to be discerning. We are called to be the perpetual Lot’s wife, turning away from destructive behaviors or norms or laws but also turning back in life-giving love and compassion. We are to turn away from the consumerism that will overflow the landfills and turn toward organizations that help people sustain themselves; to turn from the promiscuity that commodifies bodies and toward a view of beauty that honors all body shapes and sizes; to turn loudly from skyrocketing military spending and loudly toward funds for

school improvement or medical assistance or the arts.

This is the invitation: to spin, to twirl, to dance with Lot’s wife in this holy place of tension.

That might have been the story of Lot’s wife. It might not have been. But if we imagine her in this other way, we find we have a new lesson. We find that the new lesson, to regress to those childhood Sunday school paradigms, is “*Do be like Lot’s wife.*” Seek the peace of the city where you dwell. Live openly and joyfully among its people. Love so ferociously that you begin to understand what it means that everyone is your neighbor.

If you find that for all your loving you cannot redeem this world, well then, what is there for you to do but let compassion for its people overwhelm you? What is there for you to do but, as you turn to mourn what you could not save, weep yourself into a pillar of salt?

—*Suzanne Ehst teaches English and theater at Bethany Christian High School in Goshen, Indiana. She recently completed Master’s work that focused on literature and writing as spiritual practice.*



To Be Swiss Mennonite Is to Be Quiet

While Mother practices organ, I lean far out of the sanctuary window, eating sweet summer. Like a crocheted tablecloth, dusk drapes the graves of great-grandparents, alive to me only in pictures, only in rusted rakes and milking pails, now leaning in neglected corners of the barn. Do they cringe now, inside pine boxes, at this loud, instrumental prelude, shake their heads at Sunday girls in bright skirts above the knee, and our long hair, shining silk?

I know why you were buried here, I want to tell them. Too many rules, too many quarrels over dancing and uncovered heads. When coffins were plucked from the earth like red beets in the middle of the night, away from the mother church, you made a pact to rest together here.

There is so much more I want to know about my family—I want to live their definitions of love.

Grandma: tell me of the unborn baby lost while picking apples. Grandpa: tell me how you felt when your son denied your God, when the cancer bit into you, when you look out on your father’s father’s fields and know you, too, will leave them.

I want to know why, when gathered in dining rooms, we talk about weather, avoiding conflict always, and asking, instead, for second helpings.

Sometimes, our quiet
is like a warm quilt in stifling heat—
I want to fling it from my legs and
onto the floor, dancing in cool, new morning!
I want to unlatch all the windows, lean
far into the summer, and
let the music out.

—*Rebecca Rossiter, Kidron, Ohio, is working toward a Master's degree in poetry at Ohio University, teaches writing to college freshmen, and is a published composer and folksinger. She served with Mennonite Voluntary Service in Seattle, Washington, during 2004-05 in hopes of encouraging young Americans to serve their country without investing in war. Her most recent work often focuses on her Anabaptist roots, paired with a growing concern that active pacifism and simple living are evaporating from many Mennonite churches. She is currently working on a book of poems exploring her parents' humanitarian work in Monrovia, Liberia.*

Finding Hope Even in the Real World

Jody Fernando

“That counseling ain’t gonna help no one,” the speculation rolled off Marco’s sorrowful lips, no hint of their familiar bitterness. “We’re still gonna think the whole day about how he died. The driver was stoned—ran right into Dennis on the side of the road while the mother of his unborn child watched from their car. It just wasn’t fair, you know. All he ever did was smile.”

My teacher-self paused slightly, there in the hallway, to ponder the meaning his words held. Just a week before, I’d sent Marco, once again, to the vice-principal for lack of respect. I’d never really bought into his tough-guy shell; nonetheless, he’d pushed the limit too far that day.

Yet through his words today, my original suspicions were confirmed—his heart was breaking, life was unfair, and he wanted more than what these days offered. With shrugs of “I don’t care” and “none-a-yer-business,” he liked to pretend he was hopeless. But in the few words he shared, I suspected he was closer to hope than he let on.

As Carl says in Willa Cather’s *O Pioneers*, “There are only two or three human stories, and they go on re-

peating themselves as fiercely as if they had never happened before.” This simple commentary seems haunting when one of the human stories repeats itself to those who have not yet experienced it. *Grief is always new*. Strange how it is not something to which we comment, “Been there, done that, movin’ on.” *Loss paralyzes us*. The world appears to stop, as all that was seemingly urgent and important fades away.

A son loses his father and we all stop to weep. A mother loses her hopeful companion and our hearts sink in pain. After all these years here on earth, one would think we might be used to death and pain by now. *No chance*.

All these years here on earth, and I would think I’d be used to some death and pain by now. *No chance*. One of Willa’s human stories is now repeating itself, fiercely, in *my* life for the first time. While I am certain this story has been told over and over for generations, it still catches me off guard, sends me reeling, snatches my breath away.

I have been married for only a few months, and each month of marriage has grown more difficult than the last. The intimacy of such a relationship has forced us to face the depravity of our true selves. Truly, the heart is deceitful above all things; and it is in marriage that we finally are forced to face our long denied deceit of stubborn habits, selfish expectations, and

unrealistic dreams. Disappointment surges as I grapple with the reality of truly knowing and loving *everything* about another despite his flaws.

Flaws, I chuckle, *such an understatement of the tears, the fights, the misunderstandings!* And yet, to overcome this trial, I must allow our intimacy to become far more ugly, painful, and revolting than I had ever anticipated.

We enter the counselor’s office with some trepidation, fearful that if we acknowledge our struggle it will destroy us. In that small room, a gentle, observant soul with a white board and a marker sets us off on a journey toward deep, no-holds-barred intimacy that takes a lifetime to develop—far from Hollywood’s fluff-of-the-month romance story.

This intimacy becomes the microscope through which I am examined without relent, inside and out. It smooshes me flat on its viewing slide, no cell left unseen. I am humiliated to be seen for what I truly am—yet also relieved to finally come out of hiding.

In the past, such transparency appeared immensely appealing to me. To know and be known beckoned as *the* pinnacle of human experience. Yet now that it is actually happening, it feels like it is *the* inferno. Put simply, I do not want my knight-in-shining-armor husband to be tarnished. I also do not want to acknowledge that some of the carefully crafted habits I have formed may be more harmful than healthy.

My starry dreams melt to realistic faults as I learn that, in marriage, we live with human beings, not human dreams.

My starry dreams melt to realistic faults as I learn that, in marriage, we live with human beings, not human dreams. My high hopes crash to humdrum expectations as I face the reality that even I myself cannot measure up to my own standards of perfection.

In the pit of my stomach, I find now both deep disappointment and great hope in life. Sometimes I am tempted to sugarcoat my disappointments and pretend that life is just plain peachy, that I have no problems or sore emotions. Yet in this moment, I speak solely from the disappointment in that pit of my stomach. I speak from my own personal tragedy of life, “I so wish this story of pain and disappointment weren’t repeating itself through me.” Then I sit back and let my long withheld tears fall.

Through my tears, unexpectedly, I read another’s story of tragedy with an odd hope: “We can use any tragedy as a stumbling block or a stepping stone,” comments Glyn, a Lou Gehrig’s patient very near to death. “I hope [my death] will not cause my family to be bitter. I hope I can be an example that God is wanting us to trust in the good times and the bad. For if we don’t trust when times are tough, we don’t trust at all.” (In Max Lucado, *The Applause of Heaven*, Word Publishing, 1990, 5).

On encountering these words, hope emerges from that same pit of my stomach. While the nature of my current tragedy stems from an entirely different experience than Glyn’s, I catch an oh-so-slight glimpse of those who face their own failures

and disappointments and pain. I catch a glimpse of why it has come to me. In one fleeting moment, a glimmer of hope comes to the shadows of my disappointment.

And suddenly the glimmer turns to a beam and illuminates all that I am. It illuminates my fear to trust, to believe that hope may still be there even when all I see are shadows. It melts away the sugarcoated lies in which I have buried myself and shamelessly exposes my fear of transparency. In one slight flicker, it changes the lens through which I have been viewing hope.

The counselor puts her marker down, and grins subtly at the realizations we are making. Through tears, I look beyond myself to see my husband for the first time—a broken but redeemed soul encountering the story just as fiercely as I am.

From pits of despair, the psalmist often proclaims variations on the theme of “My hope is in you, my savior, my Lord” (as in Ps. 25, 42, 130). It is difficult to imagine that the psalmist’s picture of hope as a romantic sunset and trouble-free life. He does not allow for this misinterpretation when he speaks of his enemies attacking or his heart anguishing within him or his body wasting away. The hope of the psalmist stems from a view of his savior that outlasts his own tragedy. His hope stretches to a life beyond his own.

It is with this view that my own disappointment begins to mingle with hope. No longer is my tragedy characterized solely by its shadows. The light has shown itself, and I am

stepping, albeit slowly, toward it. It may be that each remaining step will continue to hold some sorrow, struggle, and pain; I do not yet know. Yet as I turn to face the light, the shadow is now cast behind me.

What I do know is that Marco was right: hearts break, life is unfair, and we deserve more than what these days give us. It is only when I allow my disappointment in this life to surface that I truly understand how “hope

does not disappoint us.” When God comes to us at our most powerless moments, who among us is *able* to stand (Rom. 5:4-6)? Who among us even *wants* to?

—*Jody Fernando is a freelance writer and teacher from Indiana. She loves blue skies, kind words, and sharing the giggles of her children with her fiercely beloved husband of six years.*

Can You Remember the Smell of Alfalfa on Your Hands?

The fields still take my breath away. It isn't like I forget them in the city or even discover something better in cur-le-cuing sidewalks or the eager pull of skylines at night. I don't notice them at first, as I'm bringing in suitcases or petting the dog. It is when

I'm on my way to the bulk food store, when the purples and blues of sudden winter drip down past the lull of the hills, that my body and mind are still, the car racing towards shelves of dried fruits, honey-roasted nuts, wheels of pale cheese.

I am the only car on gravel roads, but I'm speeding because I am used to motion; I am speeding to beat a rush that does not exist in a place where cows outnumber people, and stars speak at night. Stepping out from behind the wheel, into the smell of living acres, there is nothing to separate me from pastures and skies holding snow, from the color that spills like paintbrush water behind the fields that raised me.

—*Rebecca Rossiter*

In Those Days at Camp Tel Hai

Mel Leaman

I felt rather pensive as I left the first session with my spiritual director. I had been feeling lost, but our meeting did spark a ray of hope that someday whatever part of me was missing might be found. Snowflakes danced in the blustery winds of that cold December day, yet warmth caressed my soul.

As the car rounded a corner, I saw in the distance, just beyond the next cleanly shaved field, a strangely familiar view. On drawing closer, all became clear. I had been here before. Some 45 years ago I had made a turn down this country road with a group of other young boys headed for Camp Tel Hai.

In fact, a directional sign indicated the obvious: Camp Tel Hai still served the surrounding religious community. Even this summer children had scrambled out of church vans and buses, or Dad's and Mom's SUV, to spend a week meant for the enrichment of body and spirit.

I vaguely remembered memorizing countless Bible verses to qualify for a discount at some camp. Was this the one? Nostalgia struck, and I made the turn.

Memories drifted across my mind as the car nosed its way another mile or so toward the camp: the little

boy in his cabin feeling homesick and whimpering his way into the night's rest; an early morning, teary-eyed confession of another young camper who had wet the bed; Bible time in the big building. The layout of the grounds had changed significantly, but I felt a sense of homecoming on finding that my old "Oak" cabin was still standing. That's what oaks do so well.

I was most interested in finding the swimming pool. This is not to say that memories of free swim were that fond, but they were the most vivid. The pool had been moved indoors, adjacent to a new gym. There is now a lake where the pool once hosted hordes of excited boys and girls on hot summer days.

It was there that I lost my identity. I had a sibling three years my elder. In his presence, Melvin became David's little brother. In those days, he could do everything better than I could. He had no inhibitions about showing-off his skills—and these were particularly spectacular at pool side. It wasn't that I didn't take pride in a periodic flip off the low board or a dive off the high; it was just that what I did paled in comparison to the risky contortions Dave incorporated into his dives.

He had one move no other person in the entire camp would try. Even the big teenage lifeguards could not work up the courage to attempt this stunt. It was the handstand, and off the high board, at that! While others waited

anxiously on the ladder, Dave would walk slowly to the end of the board, all eyes upon him. The girls would gasp as he curled his legs skyward and squeezed the edge of the board with his fingers.

He'd held the position just long enough to ensure onlookers he was in complete control, then push off to the blue waters below. In that moment, Dave was the envy of every young man who had enough testosterone to know he had been knocked down another rung on the ladder of survival of the fittest.

Dave was always in control. He did it well. I rarely got the winning side of the wishing bone. It was futile for me to start an argument, pick a fight, state an opposing opinion, or attempt to win a game. Dave always had the final word, the bigger fist, the right answer, and the better hand. If he really didn't have any of the above, he faked it well enough for me to concede. The roles were scripted. I gave in; he won. Dave made the decisions; I simply followed. He knew; I never knew.

Even our faith journeys fit the pattern. Dave was the apologist who never faltered; I felt every question could make me fall. He thinks; I feel. Dave spent the last 35 years as a therapist; I have been a school teacher, a youth director, a therapist, a pastor, and now a professor.

In the earlier years I hated him, looked up to him, and aspired to be

like him. In the later years, from my senior year in high school to now, I have loved him deeply. He became the friend who encouraged me to step into some of the most positive defining moments of my life.

I have had such respect for him that only in the past 10 years did I feel entitled and differentiated enough to share a truly reciprocal, give-and-take relationship with him. These days we set aside a day each year to share our life experiences. The packages are basically the same. He remains steady and I still stutter, but we both see the gift of the other.

In those days, I experienced periodic respites from the rigors of sibling rivalry and the struggle of being Dave's brother. There by the pool I surrendered to the benefits of our hierarchical relationship. I was proud to be identified with him. I imagined that those who saw me by his side recognized my own potential for

greatness. I was esteemed by association.

Admittedly, self was sacrificed on the altar of enmeshment, but Melvin would be lost for only a season. He would be found some other day at some other place—just not at Camp Tel Hai.

—Mel Leaman, West Grove, Pennsylvania, is Assistant Professor of Religion at Lincoln University. Leaman was raised in a Mennonite home, then on becoming Christian education and youth director at Asbury United Methodist Church, Maitland, Florida, joined the UMC. A minister in Ohio and Pennsylvania 1981-1999, he received his M.Div. from the Methodist Theological School in Ohio and his D.Min. in marriage and family from Eastern Baptist (now Palmer) Theological Seminary in 1990. He can be reached at jmleaman@comcast.net.



Mattresses and Gardens

Deborah Good

For purposes of the story, we shall call the mattress Abby.

Almost three years ago, two friends and I were apartment hunting just as another friend was moving and wanting to lighten her load. She gave us house plants, dishes, a coffee table—and Abby: one big, awkward, futon mattress without a frame.

We did not want to turn Abby down. After all, we had almost no furniture and were soon to have a three-bedroom apartment to fill. When the time came to move in, however, we found we had no idea what to do with her. Abby was heavy, blobby, and badly needed a futon frame to hold her shape.

I searched briefly for a cheap frame, but to no avail. Eventually we folded her in thirds, leaning one against a wall, and made her into a squatty loveseat-of-sorts in our living room. It wasn't ideal, but for about a year, Abby made herself at home. Then, she was displaced by a nicer piece of furniture and, again, seemed useless to us, sitting awkwardly against a radiator in one of our bedrooms.

Finally, a new possibility presented itself. A repositioned desk had created a brand-new corner with one

wall. My roommate and I decided to stuff Abby in the corner. We pushed, tugged, folded, and lifted Abby's heavy form until she settled into place—a low, comfortable armchair. Now Abby is one of my favorite spots in the house. When I sit there to read or stare out the window, drinking tea, she seems to hold me, as though I am sitting in the palm of a giant and comforting hand.

Possibility has been an important word for me recently. If I wrote Hallmark cards, I might follow Abby's story with a rosy slogan: "If good can come of a lumpy, old futon mattress, just imagine all the possibility that lives inside you!"

But I am not Hallmark. I'm just another tired, little human being trying to do something creative with my life.

There is a neighborhood in North Philadelphia that continually inspires me. It's certainly a tough neighborhood, the kind that never makes it onto the tourist brochures. This is a place where people—mostly young black men—are lost every year to drug violence and the (terribly unjust) prison system. Yet this is also a place where an African-American man named Arthur Hall and a Chinese woman named Lily Yeh had the eyes to see possibility in an abandoned and neglected lot.

Hall invited Yeh, an outsider to the neighborhood, to build a garden there, which she did. Over the years, the garden was followed by more parks and gardens, mosaics, murals, youth and theater programs. Today it

is called the Village of Arts and Humanities. (Please Google it to learn more.) I do not talk about *hope* as freely as some, but I have walked the streets of the Village, and when I turn the corner from Germantown Avenue onto Alder Street with its many-colored mosaics, hope feels like a blast of cool air in my face.

In a magazine article, Lily Yeh put it this way: "I came to conceive of the neighborhood as a piece of living sculpture, in which people live and work, and the forms are brought to life by living community events" ("A Luminous Place," *The Other Side*, Jul./Aug. 2004).

Like Yeh, I want to be a seeker of possibilities—in my own life, in others, in broken people and places, even in old futon mattresses. Every other week, I sit with a "youth aid panel" of community volunteers. We serve as an alternative to the court system for first-time juvenile offenders. Through a series of questions, we try to learn not only about the offense committed but also about each individual teenager, his interests and passions, the directions her life *could* go, those pieces that most need nurture.

One could say that most of these kids were born into a world with far fewer possibilities than those kids who have easier access to money and education. And this is true. The "freedom and possibility" some of our national leaders claim are so American really have more to do with money than with citizenship. Yet I want to believe even the most limited situations leave some room for choice, creativity, and hope.

I was recently at a conference whose theme, “The Creative Leap,” encouraged its participants to approach their lives and their work in new and imaginative ways. John O’Donohue, a wonderful Irish poet and Catholic scholar, gave one of the keynote addresses. He spoke about how, over and over throughout our lives, we are faced with multiple possibilities and have to choose only one.

I would add that we are faced, over and over, with circumstances beyond our control—be they cancer, job loss, or hurricanes—which also shape our lives. The sum of these conscious choices and uncontrollable circumstances, then, creates the reality we wake up to each morning.

I sometimes think of my life as a ball of clay being constantly shaped. As a child, that clay was molded by a bilingual public education, war in the Gulf, my best friend who refused to wear dresses (so I refused too), and my decision to join a co-ed soccer team.

In college, I chose to study sociology, not education or religion. I was shaped by the books I read, movies I saw, by my professors and friends. Afterward, I chose to move to Philadelphia, not Guatemala or Tucson or Washington, D.C. I took an editing job at a magazine. In 2004, I lost that job when the magazine closed. Then came Dad’s cancer and, soon after, his death.

Through it all, my life has been shaped by so many larger forces: my

race, my socioeconomic situation, my Mennonite background—whose frugality may explain why I choose to save an old, useless futon today. And somewhere in the mix, I believe another force is also shaping my clay: call it Mystery, call it Great Love, call it God.

Who would I be if the shaping forced had been different—if I had, for example, grown up wearing cowboy boots and driving a pickup instead of playing basketball in the alley behind our row house? And what would my life look like if I had made different choices along the way?

“What happened to your un-lived lives?” asked John O’Donohue. “And where do they dwell?”

He claims that all the unrealized options—the ones we did not choose along the way—continue to journey along with us. They exist in a “penumbral world around us, which is different than the unconscious and different than the shadow, but is another world of implicit, latent, held-over possibility that accompanies every life.”

I love this idea—that a whole world of possibilities is accompanying each of us. Maybe it’s like having a garden inside me. If all I ever do is look outward and straight ahead, I may never realize it’s there. But if I pause and am willing to do a little digging, I just might find possibilities where I thought there were none.

I imagine this kind of digging takes practice, and I commit myself to

it. I want to live viewing with a creative eye not only my own life but also, just as importantly, the lives of others. I want to believe that even in the darkest of circumstances, practiced diggers can help one another uncover possibilities for growth and change—like transforming broken neighborhoods into art and an old mattress into a large and comforting hand.

—Deborah Good, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, is taking odd jobs while she works on family writing projects based on interviews with her father and grandparents. She owes much of the inspiration for this essay to John O’Donohue’s keynote address at the 2006 Psychotherapy Networker Symposium in Washington, D.C. She can be reached at deborahagood@gmail.com.



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Seeing the the Entire Trip

Michael A. King

We were hours from home, my wife Joan and I. The phone rang. A panic-stricken voice said, “Oh Dad, I crashed my car!” She was okay. But stranded with hood buckled two feet up, front end smashed in, radiator’s blood running green on the street. Coasting toward a red light, she had reached for a chocolate. Too late she had watched her car hood slam under a truck.

Her mother and I spent the frantic trip back home pondering the meaning of life and parenting and hope amid destruction. Next day after visiting the crashed car, which Joan reported made her want to throw up, we went for groceries. A young mother had a baby in her shopping cart. The baby was looking worshipfully up at the mother. The mom was cooing down at the baby. They looked so happy. They looked so carefree. They looked so innocent.

Joan and I burst out laughing. The poor mother gazed uneasily at our post-crash faces, haggard and yet strangely giddy.

So we explained: “We’re sorry you caught us laughing,” we said. “You must think we’re crazy. We were laughing because we remember having babies.

And we remember older parents telling us, ‘Enjoy these days while you have them.’ Then last night our daughter crashed her car and we were just thinking again of when she was just a happy baby like yours.”

The young mom smiled tentatively but with a hint of fear still woven in. Now I guessed she wasn’t scared of us. Rather, she seemed to be peeking briefly at a fearsome future of babies who grow up to crash cars.

No doubt she did realize that soon enough this brief world of life with baby would be gone. But if she was like us back then, she didn’t fully believe in what was to come. I doubt any of us entirely believe that what we see ahead in other lives will also befall us. This can be good. Joan and I often wonder if we’d have plunged into the holy insanity of parenting if we could have seen where it would take us.

But I did dare to consider that we had lived much of the path that young mother was just setting foot on; we could see things that were for her largely shrouded in fog. Then I thought forward to my parents and their peers decades ahead of me on the way. Surely they too see clearly so much that for me, as I skirt their land of old age but am not yet its citizen, remains wrapped in mist.

And that made me hope that I am not quite yet so old (at 51) to be heard as only self-serving when I say that it saddens me to see how quickly in our culture we turn from those who have the eyes to see the entire journey. In

my publishing work, for instance, I see how often the voices of those past retirement age are silenced or denigrated—and how much they have yet to say if given the platform.

This is not to suggest we should listen less to the youthful voices; I remember gratefully the editors who let

It saddens me to see how quickly in our culture we turn from those who have the eyes to see the entire journey.

my twenty-something voice be heard back when I could say some things with a vigor and clarity these later years of grappling with life’s challenges and complexities have sometimes muddled. And I want my daughters and their generation likewise to be able to share the insights their life stages and experiences—including car crashes!—teach them.

But it is to dream of again treating parents and grandparents and all our elders as in biblical times: as those who tell us what to watch for on the roads they but not yet we have traveled, and who bless and cheer us on the way.

A grandparent sent my daughter a contribution to her car reconstruction fund. My daughter was so moved. Her pain had been honored. Her grandparent had been this way before and was cheering her past the literal and symbolic wreckage of her life from the wise and generous perspective of one who could see the entire trip.

—Michael A. King, Telford, Pennsylvania, is pastor, Spring Mount Mennonite Church. This column first appeared in *The Mennonite*, May 2, 2006.

The Task for Third Agers: Jubilee/Shalom

Milo D. Stahl

Jubilee/Shalom

Jubilee/Shalom, needed for well-being and peace on our small blue planet earth, is available in the twenty-first century. The human race has mostly refused to accept this gift offered several thousand years ago (see the blessings God's people refuse in Deut. 28). Might it now be accepted and shared by *Third Agers* (and others) with hearts, commitment, and the spirit of *shalom* through which to fulfill the task?

In the Old Testament, the prescribed Jubilee or Sabbath year (see for instance Lev. 25) includes (1) leaving the soil fallow; (2) the remission of debts; (3) the liberation of slaves; (4) the return to each individual of his family's property.

Interestingly, Jesus does not emphasize leaving the soil fallow—only this of the Jubilee prescriptions had become common usage in his day. Yet Jesus does emphasize forgiving debts and freeing slaves. And for Jesus, as John Howard Yoder views it, “The quantity of money that one gives is of little importance. What

is important is what one gives. If it is a part of one's income, then that is not righteousness, goodness, and good faith. If it is capital that one gives, then everything is in order” (*The Politics of Jesus*, Eerdmans, 1972, 76).

Meanwhile shalom can be described as “rightness between people and God: peace, safety, holistic health, welfare, tranquility, and unselfish prosperity!” (Milo D. Stahl, *Shalom, Beyond Retirement and Death*, unpublished manuscript, 2005, 50).

Qualified Third Agers?

Then who are the Third Agers? Here I refer to those in the final third of life. Social security checks and Third Agers *seem* to go together. However, not only may such income not continue, but also, and more importantly, organizing one's life around it does not qualify recipients as participants in Jubilee/Shalom. Jubilee and shalom are given only by God to those willing and ready for the task.

Age that has learned wisdom can certainly qualify, but “compassionate as their Father” is their primary qualification for such service. Some of us in the church have enough money to make us want to save some for our security (capital), but few of us have enough to become willing to give it for Jubilee.

However, faith to welcome participation in Jubilee/Shalom may be

Some of us . . . have enough money to make us want to save some for our security (capital), but few of us have enough to give it for Jubilee.

growing. For example, Jacob A. Shenk of the Shenandoah Valley, Virginia, already in the mid-twentieth century had Jubilee faith. He negotiated with the Internal Revenue Service to give away 90 percent of his profits and live on 10 percent. I have not known others willing to go that far. It should not be surprising that he was also chair of the Virginia Mennonite Mission Board. (He was piloting his plane on a mission for that board with fellow mission worker Melvin Weaver as passenger when they died in a thundercloud.)

Two women have shown me shalom faith: Annie Brubaker and, Viola, my dear wife of 50 years. Aunt Annie had rheumatoid arthritis in many of her body's joints and was confined to a wheelchair and bed for 30 or more years. She was dependent on her daughters, Ruth and Esther, for most of her care.

Yet many who came to visit her, hoping to bring comfort and solace, went away as the ones blessed. She knew how to minister shalom to them. As I worked in their household for my cousin Norman, her son, for a couple of years when I was eight and nine, I was able to see this close up. It taught me the meaning of shalom even before I knew the word! Aunt Annie radiated the shalom God had given her. I saw how others were able to accept this gift.

I also learned shalom in a very intimate way from Viola, who was para-

lyzed from her mid-chest down in a March 2000 car accident. Appalled by the constant care and experiencing for a while extreme nerve-end pain from the damage to her spinal column, she would have been glad to leave this world. But finally she became willing to *live* as God prepared the way.

Thankfully, Viola's pain subsided. She continues to radiate shalom through her positive outlook and faith. Today she is finding time and energy to help others to hope and renewal. She was a psychiatric nurse before her accident; she now continues to help others with the shalom she lives in community each day. She is grateful for her many volunteers, whom she accepts amid lacking ability to remunerate them. She has learned both to rest in and to give shalom—and thus be a mentor to many, including myself.

Severe pain was common for both these dear women. Nevertheless, adjusting to their disabilities, they exuded the strength and trust that come from that gift of heaven, shalom.

The Church's Offering to World Need

The church is *not* an agency of earthly kingdoms, which rise and fall. Rather, the church is the mission source of those who have accepted the call from the Father, God of love and mercy.

"Shalom, the Hebrew word for peace, denotes the well-being of the total person. God's shalom is the rec-

onciling, healing, enriching work of his grace. God has acted, and acts, first to reconcile us to himself through Christ and then to one another in Christ. Second, God's peace, God's shalom, is expressed by creating a community with others, a community with a 'covenant of peace'." (Myron S. Augsburger, *The Peacemaker*, Abingdon, 1987, 18).

"God has something in mind for us other than a 'comfortable retirement at the end of the American Dream.'"

This community is thus controlled and created by God and his Spirit—the church is its origin and life! It cannot be controlled by human governments. Thus the failure of social security as the foundational reality around which to organize our lives in our Third-Age years. Jubilee/Shalom is a divine possibility and as such is the church's offering to world need!

Lynn A. Miller, a Bluffton, Ohio, minister who has been pushing many of us about having *enough* as Third Agers, has also been calling us to a life of service. That sounds like Jubilee/Shalom.

It is heartwarming to read in Lynn's booklet pushing Shalom/Jubilee, *The Power of Enough: Finding Contentment by Putting Stuff in Its Place* (Evangel Press, 2003), "If there's any truth to God's statement that not only will he meet your needs but that you'll also have more for good works, then you'll always come out a winner" (53).

Lynn fights materialism with his call for us to join him in living Jubilee/Shalom: "God has something in mind for us other than a 'comfortable

retirement at the end of the American Dream.'" He finally says, "Ask, Listen, and say *Yes!* And God will bless you as you go in the contentment you find by living in his presence" (97). Here is how Jesus put it:

"God's Spirit is on me;
he's chosen me to preach the message
of good news to the poor;
Sent me to announce pardon to prisoners
and recovery of sight to the blind,
To set the burdened and battered free,
to announce, 'This is God's year
to act!' (Eugene Peterson, *The Message/Remix*, Navpress, 2003,
1872).

A Way Where There Is No Way

To live sanely in our world, we must do what may at times be unthinkable or untenable but supremely humane and godly: Jubilee/Shalom.

We follow the joy of service to oth-

ers whether that be simple or difficult, even when it leads us possibly to death—though that will be only to walk through death to real life! We can do that and take the way that will save people even though it's considered "No Way" by many contemporaries. Thus Jubilee/Shalom are life-giving no matter the results.

Third Agers or any who are willing to help find the Way to God and to God's kingdom (not of this world!): *Jubilee/Shalom!*

—For over 76 years, Milo D. Stahl, Harrisonburg, Virginia, has been learning, studying, consulting, teaching, and serving in such settings as Eastern Mennonite University, Case Western Reserve University, and Michigan State University as well as with wife Viola in Jamaica under Mennonite Central Committee. In 2003 he published *Learning to Love People and Use Things*.



Hanging Out Wash as Spiritual Experience

Linda Martin

I do know that hanging out wash is not these days a leading coffee break conversation. But I find that hanging out wash supports my sensual needs and feeds my soul.

The story of how this came to be goes back 50 years, back to when I was a little girl and my mother was in the hospital a lot. As a result I got to spend many hours with a motherly single woman, Aunt Caroline. Her primary job was to care for her aging mother—my grandmother—and she was often hired as a nanny for families adjusting to new babies or to help out a family experiencing some kind of tragedy.

I was most under the care of my Aunt Caroline when I was five to seven years old. She was a woman who knew how to function as an emergent curriculum teacher even though she had only finished eighth grade herself. Her daily household responsibilities automatically included the children under her care at that particular moment.

The highlights of learning to wash and hang out clothing with my Aunt Caroline happened at my

home, and at times it happened at her home. Either place, it would go like this:

Mondays were washdays for the household's personal clothing, using an old-fashioned wringer washer. It was so exciting for me to watch and catch that flattened, squeezed-to-almost-dry clothing coming out between the two rollers. Safety was the number one lesson taught to me here: Over and over I was reminded, "Don't ever let your fingers or hands get too close to those wringers!" That caution penetrated deep into my being—because I never wanted my fingers and hands to become as flat as the wet clothes did.

The real treat for me on washday was having my own child-sized wash basket in which to carry my own doll clothes outside to my own child-height washline. Aunt Caroline thought nothing of taking the time to wash my "clean" doll clothes on this busy Monday washday. She even had a handmade child-sized apron with pockets to hold the clothespins for me to wear while hanging out *my* wash.

As we proceeded from the basement washroom to the outdoors, we would check the state of the sky—clear or cloud?—as well as "check the wind." This was important data for us to have as we talked about how long it might take to dry the clothes or that maybe today we better only put one load, because it might rain later. Of course, a rainy day meant washday had to be pushed to another day, because there was no dryer at Aunt Caroline's house.

The art and science of hanging out wash go hand in hand.

The art and science of hanging out wash go hand in hand. First we had to clean the washline with a damp cloth to make certain our clean clothes did not get dirty from dust on the line. We had to hang each piece of wash in a way that saved line space and clothespins. And of course the wash had to be hung in an aesthetically pleasing way. What would the neighbors think if our wash were hung in disorderly fashion?

We hung the specific types of clothing together. This was a wonderful exercise in categorizing. The white items of wash were hung first. The washline up would look something like this: underpants, followed by undershirts, socks, slippers. Then we would hang the outer clothes.

Finally we would hang the colored clothing. Once again, shirts had to be kept together as did trousers, dresses, and so on. Of course the trousers had to be hung inside out making it easier for the pocket liners to dry. In fact, most dark-colored clothing was hung on the line inside-out as well, because this lessened the possibility that colored clothing would become faded and bleached out by the sun.

The academic learnings of this process continued as we were diligent about conserving the amounts of clothespins we used by overlapping clothing, making it possible to use one clothespin to pin two edges of two items of clothing. This made it possible to hang out six pieces of clothing using seven clothespins instead of 12.

In addition, it was crucial to know which end of the clothing or bedding was best suited to be pinned directly onto the washline. The piece of wash dried faster if the hemmed edges were positioned at the bottom, furthest away from the line, when possible. Take a pillowcase for example: The doubled fabric hemmed edge would take longer to dry if rolled over the washline instead of being allowed to flop freely in the breeze.

Washing and hanging out the bedding would happen on Thursdays. There would never have been enough washline to hold personal items and bedding on the same day. The real bonus of bedding washday was crawling into fresh-air-scented sheets, and pillowcases that night.

The long sheets hung at a line height suited for my aunt's reach meant we had to put props under the lines so the clean, wet bedding would not touch the ground, causing the corners to become dirty. That was an Aunt Caroline job. I was just too small to manage those tall wooden props.

However, I was not too small to inherit my aunt's ability to find meaning in the ordinary happenings of the day. Because of her deliberate way of including me in the washday process as a child, I still appreciate the beauty of laundry drying outside, whether it is part of a fertile farmhouse landscape or draped over fences and rocks in a Third World country setting.

I still love hanging out wash, even in winter. It is a spiritual experience for me, especially when I am not rushed. Of course I also value my automatic washer and dryer. And no one in my neighborhood cares about the aesthetics of my garment-filled washline. Thank you, Aunt Caroline, for "home schooling" me (when home schooling did not formally exist) in ways that kept me safe, nurtured my spirit, and fed my intellect.

—*Linda L. Martin, Harleysville, Pennsylvania, is an early childhood education instructor and consultant. This story emerged from a Master's level Writing/Rubrics course assignment.*



Brimming Over

Noël R. King

Reverend Nicholas Mulder was a Baptist preacher. You wouldn't think it, what with Nicholas being a Catholic saint's name and all, but that he was.

Reverend Mulder pretty much preached fire and brimstone every week until one Sunday morning he decided to preach about gravel instead. He could see the looks of perplexity on his congregants' faces, the incomprehension, the confusion, as he veered off the familiar, well-worn path of sin and death and the torment of hell and onto this new path of rocks smashed small and fine.

He himself was mightily surprised as the words came spewing out of his mouth, surprised but, to tell you the truth, relieved as well. He hadn't realized until then just how tired he was of hell and fire and brimstone. In fact, he didn't even know what brimstone was, to be honest. He figured it was hot and unpleasant and stony, but other than that, who knew?

So he forged ahead on this particular, surprising Sunday, boldly and powerfully, albeit a tad nervously (which he hid well under his preacher's vestments), just as eager as his listeners to discover where he might be heading.

"Boulders," he said, pausing to let the word rebound around the large, ornate chapel, lined with

marble along the edges, “. . . boulders are what we encounter practically every day in our lives. Do you all run into boulders, my friends? Let me hear you now. Do you run into boulders? Tell me about your boulders!”

“Amen, Brother! We got boulders—yes we do! Preach it, Brother, preach it!”

Once he had gotten the congregation down this familiar track, affirming the rightness of all that he was saying, he could see them start to relax. They began to settle back down into their seats with a bit more confidence and a bit less ap- probation, a bit less bewilderment and a lot more interest.

“Well, do you know what *happens* to boulders when you run into them?” he continued, practically shouting now. “Do you know what *happens* when you slam right into one of those cold, hard slabs of stone?”

“No we don’t, Brother! Preach it, Brother, preach it! Tell us now, tell us!”

“What happens is *they smash into little bitty bits!* That’s what happens when a boulder does not yield the right of way—and *you do not either.*”

“You have heard it said, my friends, ‘Ashes to ashes and dust to dust.’ Well now I tell you, ‘Boulders to gravel and gravel to travel!’ So be it!”

With this bold statement, Reverend Nicholas sat back down in his velvet-lined chair behind the pulpit, not without a little astonishment at all that he had just declared. But so it was.

The First Baptist Church of Marywood was never quite the same again, and neither was Reverend Nicholas Mulder, although nobody ever quite knew why.

—*As circumstances warrant, through her Turquoise Pen column Noël R. King, South Riding, Virginia, reports on strange and wonderful things, including preaching on boulders.*



A Review of “Thank You for Smoking”

David Greiser

One of the best places to gain access to the post-modern turn in pop culture is, I believe, the world of contemporary comedy. Stand-up comedy, along with satirical TV variety shows—such as “Dennis Miller,” “The Daily Show” and “Saturday Night Live”—exemplify the genre. Much of the programming on cable TV’s Comedy Channel is drenched in a kind of cynical, glib, and soulless humor in which the aim is less often social commentary and more often the laugh for its own sake.

“Thank You For Smoking” is a film comedy birthed and steeped in a glib irony. Yet it also tries to find a moral footing, and its moral quest is revealing.

Directed by first-timer Jason Reitman (the 29-year-old son of “Ghostbusters” creator Ivan Reitman), “Thank You For Smoking” is the autobiography of a professional shill. Nick Naylor is a smooth-talking, funny, likable lobbyist for Big Tobacco. Nick’s job consists of spinning the findings of the “research” done by the tobacco industry-funded Academy of Tobacco Studies, all of which conveniently downplay the dangers of smoking. Nick’s aim is to create a cushion of legal safety for the major tobacco companies.

“Michael Jordan plays basketball,” Nick explains in one voice-over. “Charles Manson kills people. I talk.”

Nick knows he is good at talking. “You know that guy who can pick up any girl? I’m him—on crack.” The chief ethical value in Nick’s life is, as one might expect, personal freedom. Defending the freedom to choose one’s own lifestyle sometimes requires the championing of unpopular causes, such as the freedom to smoke and to sell tobacco products. In the face of the overwhelming evidence that smoking is harmful, freedom’s defense requires “a certain moral flexibility that is beyond the reach of most people,” as Nick explains to his son.

Nick’s relationship to his son is an important movie subplot. Early we learn that Nick’s wife divorced him, presumably over Nick’s career choice. Slick-talking Nick convinces his ex to allow their son to accompany dad on a work-related trip to Hollywood. Along the way Nick schools his son in the subtle techniques of debate, slyly pointing out the distinctions between argument and morality. “That’s the beauty of argument,” he explains. “If you’re good, even when you’re wrong you’re always right.”

“Thank You for Smoking” is filled with wickedly funny and smug dialogue. “Why is America the greatest country on earth?” asks Nick’s son, looking up from his homework. “Because of our endless appeals system,” Nick replies in a heartbeat. Part of Nick’s fatherly instruction includes

coaching his son in the art of debate. All the while, Nick drops subtle clues to his son about the actual risks involved in the use of tobacco.

Once a week, Nick repairs to a leather-stuffed bar with his cronies, the M.O.D. Squad (Merchants of Death). Alcohol lobbyist Polly Bailey (played by Maria Bello), gun lobbyist Bobby Jay Bliss (David Koechner), along with Nick, commiserate and compare notes on the number of fatalities their organizations have caused each month.

Some of the most effective satire in “Thank You for Smoking” pokes fun at the anti-smoking lobby. Character actor William H. Macy portrays Vermont Senator Ortolan Finistierre, a bumbling, self-righteous environmentalist whose office desk is covered with Vermont maple syrup bottles. The senator’s chief anti-smoking strategy is to introduce a bill that would require every cigarette pack to display a skull and crossbones. Such a symbol is better than words, he explains, because tobacco barons want “those who do not speak English to die.” At a Senate hearing on the bill, Nick counters the senator by claiming that the state of Vermont also must want people to die, since it produces so much of the cheese that is clogging American arteries.

Despite Nick’s veneer, the semblance of a conscience shows up at times. When the president of one tobacco company and czar of Big Tobacco (Robert Duvall, dressed like Colonel Sanders) sends him to buy

the silence of the cancer-laden Marlboro Man (Sam Elliot), Nick appears genuinely ambivalent about offering a bribe to buy silence.

With his son listening intently, Nick negotiates with this man whose life has been shortened by the product he embodied. I won’t give away the outcome of the conversation, except to say that the scene heightens the film’s moral ambivalence.

Probably the greatest strength in “Thank You for Smoking” lies in its implied insistence that moral hypocrisy exists on both sides of every ideological debate. Our major political parties would do well to listen in on this discussion.

The modernist in me chafes over movies in which style triumphs over substance; in “Thank You,” funny dialogue overpowers the “point.” Yet even if the point is only that all crusaders are morally compromised, then an investment in this film is worthwhile.

—David Greiser, *Souderton, Pennsylvania*, has said at times that if he knew God did not exist, he would have tried to become a stand-up comedian. In July, he concludes 10 years of preaching in Souderton, Pennsylvania, and becomes Director of the Pastoral Training program at Hesston College in Kansas.



The Blind Songwriter

A Review of Her Heart Can See: The Life and Hymns of Fanny J. Crosby

Marlin Jeschke

Her Heart Can See: The Life and Hymns of Fanny J. Crosby, by Edith Blumhofer. Eerdmans, 2005.

I can't imagine anybody of my generation not knowing the name of Fanny Crosby, blind songwriter of the last half of the 1800s, even though new religious music—of the Gaithers, for example—is replacing the gospel songs of her day. Crosby's story is told in a new biography, *Her Heart Can See: The Life and Hymns of Fanny J. Crosby*, by Edith Blumhofer, professor of history at Wheaton College.

Frances Jane Crosby lived from 1820 to 1915. This was an era in American history marked by the development of a railroad network but punctuated also by the Civil War of 1861 to 1865, an era that witnessed an explosion in the writing and publication of gospel songs.

Blinded in childhood as a result of an incompetent doctor's bad treatment of an eye infection, Fanny was privileged at age 15 to enter the school for the blind that had just been started in New York City. Here she

blossomed as a bright student and then as a teacher until she got married and left that institution in 1858.

Although she never learned to write (witnesses attested her X on legal signatures), she early on developed a gift for rhyme and often recited verses before public officials and philanthropists to demonstrate the effectiveness of the school for the blind. She began, in fact, to provide lyrics for the growing interest in music in American public schools and singing schools fostered by pioneers in this endeavor such as Lowell Mason.

Many of these were secular songs in support of civic or patriotic life. A proud American, Crosby carried with her a small silk American flag all of her adult life.

As a descendent of Puritans, Crosby had always been a churchgoer, but in 1864 a religious experience prompted her to turn her gifts primarily to composing hymn and gospel song texts. This led to her collaboration with notable music writers and publishers of the time, such as William Bradbury, William Howard Doane, Robert Lowry, Philip P. Bliss (until Bliss's tragic death in 1868), and above all, Ira D. Sankey, singer for the famous D. L. Moody from 1871 until Moody's death in 1899.

These music writers and hymn publishers took advantage of the growing appetite for gospel songs in America. Some historians claim Sankey's "Gospel Songs" eventually

sold as many as 50 million copies. Crosby lyrics made up almost one tenth of Sankey's last gospel song book. I counted 31 in Walter Rauschenbusch's German translation of Sankey's gospel song book, published in 1896 and used in the congregation in which I grew up. Incidentally, the Mennonite *Church Hymnal* (1927) carries 11 Crosby songs, *The Mennonite Hymnal* (1969) has 12, and the current *Hymnal: A Worship Book* only eight.

At the height of her career Crosby associated with many wealthy folk,

some of them wealthy from publication of gospel songs or other businesses—for example, Phoebe Palmer Knapp, whose husband was in the insurance business. Knapp, daughter of Methodist holiness teacher Phoebe Palmer, had a mansion furnished with a big organ. She sponsored many recitals in her massive parlor and wrote music for several of Crosby's texts. Crosby was always welcome at the Knapp mansion, even for extended stays.

Crosby was also a guest at the Cincinnati home of William Howard Doane, millionaire manufacturer of woodworking machinery who was more interested in the composition of hymn tunes than in his other business. Well-known even nationally, Crosby three times dined at the White House.

Still, Crosby never got royalties from the hymn texts she wrote that

Crosby had always been a churchgoer, but in 1864 a religious experience prompted her to turn her gifts primarily to composing hymn and gospel song texts.

were published by the thousands and made publishers their millions. She was content with that arrangement, because she always had enough to live on and even to retain a caregiver or housekeeper. She had an estate of only \$2,000 at her death.

Enjoying relatively good health, Fanny Crosby also took an active interest in New York's missions to the poor, alcoholics, homeless, and unemployed. She visited many such missions and spoke at some of their services. At one time in the 1880s, Manhattan had no less than 121 city missions.

Having been blind from earliest childhood, Crosby learned how to negotiate New York's streets, sometimes with a guide, sometimes apparently getting help from other pedestrians along the way. She personally counseled penitents at missions she visited.

Turning to the content of Crosby's hymns, Blumhofer's examination of the faith reflected in them shows her to have been located comfortably within America's broad, warm 1800s evangelicalism, the kind prevailing before the modernist-fundamentalist debates of the early 1900s developed its doctrinal preoccupation. Holding membership in the Methodist church during most of her adult life, Crosby parted with the Calvinism of her Puritan ancestors, stressing the themes of the love of God and nearness to Christ and the cross.

"While she did not record a profession of a second blessing," says Blumhofer, "Crosby took delight in the company of those who did." As a

sample of her own tastes, Crosby once identified "Saved by Grace" as her personal favorite. This suggests her confidence in the love of God and highlights her hope of heaven, which she so often connected with light and the recovery of sight.

As already mentioned, Crosby was married at 38 to another blind student she met at the New York City Institution for the Blind, Alexander van Alstine, 10 years her junior. Van Alstine later became an organist at a Brooklyn church. For some reason Crosby and van Alstine quit living together a few years after their marriage, though they never divorced. Crosby never spoke about it and did not seem to grieve when she received news of van Alstine's death, though she once hinted poetically at having missed a love she had hoped for. Fanny Crosby herself died of a massive stroke in February 1915, just short of 95 years of age.

Blumhofer's 345-page book is really more than a biography. Crosby dictated her own life story, *Memoirs of Eighty Years*, in 1904 and 1905, and the book was published in 1906. Being blind, she left no papers. Rather than rehash Crosby's autobiography, Blumhofer offers context for Crosby's life, devoting considerable space to the growth of the music publishing industry in the America of the 1800s. Blumhofer even reviews briefly the history of copyright legislation as it affected gospel song publishing, something that didn't interest Crosby (and may not interest many readers of this book).

Blumhofer also devotes a chapter to the growth and popularity of the Sunday school movement. Congregations with sanctuaries seating 1,000 might have that same number of children in their Sunday afternoon Sunday school, and these Sunday schools were hungry for new, easy gospel songs, which publishers then supplied in the tens and hundreds of thousands of copies.

This story of the life and hymns of Fanny J. Crosby is a welcome survey of the gospel song aspect of a crucial era in American Christianity.

—A widely published author, Marlin Jeschke, Goshen, Indiana, is Professor Emeritus of Philosophy and Religion at Goshen College, where he taught for 33 years.



If Land Is a Gift

Reviews of The Storm Gathering, Friends and Enemies in Penn's Woods, and Rethinking Holy Land

Daniel Hertzler

The Storm Gathering by Lorette Treese. Stackpole Books, 2002.

Friends and Enemies in Penn's Woods by William A. Pencak and Daniel K. Richter (Eds.). The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004.

Rethinking Holy Land by Marlin Jeschke. Herald Press, 2005.

Marlin Jeschke observes that land is a gift from God; he proposes Abraham as a model, a person who lived peaceably with his neighbors rather than seeking to drive them off their land as is generally done. "Abraham's acceptance of the land as a gift . . . demonstrates a new way of coming into possession of territory—to receive it as a gift of God and to possess it peacefully" (31).

Jeschke's book is particularly aimed at the conflict in Israel-Palestine, but he also generalizes more broadly. His thesis serves as commentary on the other two books, focused on land issues in Pennsylvania.

The first of these books recounts problems of the Penn brothers, who perceived that they had inherited Pennsylvania from their father William. The second fills in various details from the perspectives of the Native Americans and the Euro-Americans who struggled over the territory.

I have a stake in this story because my ancestor, Jacob Hertzler, bought land from the Penn family. I am here by virtue of the generosity of William Penn, who was given land by King Charles II in payment of a debt owed to Penn's father.

There is a tradition that Penn did not consider this a gift without obligation and that he negotiated with Native Americans and paid them for land. It is also well known that he invited persecuted people from Europe to come to his land. The first Mennonites arrived in 1683, but my Amish ancestor did not appear until 1749, 31 years after William Penn's death.

When William Penn died, the land he had been given was passed on to Thomas, John, and Richard Penn, sons of William's second wife. The account describes how they and their descendants sought to manage and profit from this legacy—renting and selling and trying to deal with conflicts which arose. Although William was a Quaker, Treese reports that "Thomas and his brothers were drifting from their father's faith" (1).

The first of these books recounts problems of the Penn brothers. . . . The second fills in various details from the perspectives of the Native Americans and the Euro-Americans who struggled over the territory.

Thomas Penn came to Pennsylvania in 1732, more than 30 years after his father had been here. He stayed until 1741. Although he was welcomed when he arrived, by the time he left his popularity had waned. "In his mind he had justly asserted his family's rights as landlords and proprietors over their tenants and dependents. . . . His goal appeared to be money" (11). His "tough new land policies and grasping nature had actually compromised the popularity of the Penns" (12).

The book describes a variety of problems which came to trouble the Penns. One issue was Ben Franklin's campaign to have Pennsylvania taken from them so it could become a royal colony. Franklin's efforts were not successful until the Revolution changed everything. Other concerns included periodic trouble with Indians and conflict regarding the western border.

Once the French were driven from Pittsburgh, there was a question of whether this area would become Pennsylvania or Virginia. There were also some Connecticut Yankees who squatted in the northeastern part of what were considered the Penn holdings. In addition a group of radicals called the Paxton Boys massacred a group of Conestoga Indians and even threatened Philadelphia.

All these woes were buildup to the problem with England. Although

Philadelphia dealt with the “tea question” in a more reasonable manner than Boston, Pennsylvania became a key participant in the events leading up to and during the Revolution. Governor John Penn was exiled by the revolutionaries and not permitted to function officially again.

In 1779 the assembly passed a Divestment Act which took away 24 of the 29 million acres of land the Penns had considered theirs. However, “It allowed them to keep the private estates and proprietary manors that had been surveyed before 1776 plus the associated quitrents and rent arrears. The Penns would also receive a cash settlement of 130,000 pounds” (189).

In the end the payoff was less generous, but at least Thomas Penn’s son John was able to live as an English gentleman. “Most of the Penn compensation went to him, enabling him to take up the gentrified pursuit of politics, literature, and architecture” (200).

In the meantime, my ancestor, Jacob Hertzler, had bought land from the Penn family as recounted in Silas Hertzler’s *The Hertzler-Hartzler Family History* (1952). He named his farm “Contentment” and finished his life there. Although this Amish community later scattered, his grave on the farm has been a place for descendants to visit, and the Pennsylvania Historical Society has placed a marker in front of the house along old US 22.

The ultimate result of European and Native interaction has been that the present Native American population of Pennsylvania is the smallest percentage of the total population of any U.S. state.

There, by the grace of God and the generosity of William Penn, he is buried.

Here in western Pennsylvania I live by the same grace. Also, my youngest grandson is named Jacob Miles Hertzler. His middle name recognizes his mother’s descent from the Pilgrims. Life goes on.

The second book serves to enhance our understanding of the conflicts which emerged as Europeans acquired land which Native Americans had used for generations. It shows that, while there was plenty of blame on both sides, there were also persons of goodwill who could have developed more equitable solutions if they had been allowed to prevail.

The introduction observes that the “historical memory of relations between Native Americans and Pennsylvania colonists” involves two “contrasting images.” One is William Penn’s peaceful negotiation with the Indians in 1682 and the second the 1763 massacre of Conestoga Indians by the Paxton Boys. The book indicates that the second is more historical than the first and that it needs to be understood in context.

The book asserts that despite the myth of Penn’s generosity, the ultimate result of European and Native interaction has been that the present Native American population of Pennsylvania is the smallest percentage of the total population of any U.S. state:

.01 percent compared to a .04 percent average in the other original colonies. The name of the state reflects its true nature. The intention of Europeans was to take the land. “Thus the Quaker legacy of peace did not erase the legacy of conquest” (62).

As for the Paxton Boys, they are described as frustrated patriarchs. The Indian wars of the 1700s caused panic on the frontier. The European fathers considered it their responsibility to protect their farms and families and expected the headquarters in Philadelphia to do the same. When this did not seem to be happening, they began to take things into their own hands.

Disregarding the fact that many of them were squatting on land that actually belonged to the Indians, they began to stereotype the Indians. “Indeed, many were convinced that members of the various communities of Christian Indians, who publicly professed pacifism and loyalty to the British, were really spies or supporters of those who pursued war against Pennsylvania” (213).

Some Quakers organized a “Friendly Association” which supported Indians in efforts to find peaceful solutions. “For their efforts, the Quakers earned the undying animosity of Euro-American settlers. Indeed, the Paxton Boys listed Quaker leaders among their enemies when they marched on Philadelphia” (215).

The book observes that the spirit of the Paxton Boys inspired European settlers as they moved westward. “The Paxton Boys bequeathed the legacy of a frontier associated with the violent

defense of white patriarchy against a racialized Native American enemy. . . . The march toward the Paxton Boys during the Seven Years’ War was one starting point for the progress of Manifest Destiny across the continent” (219-220).

Yet many in Pennsylvania did better than the Paxton Boys. Settlers and Native Americans interacted on the frontier, often supporting each other. “Some squatters acknowledged Indians’ occupancy and approached them for permission to remain on the land or tried to purchase it from them without the authorization of proprietary leaders” (181).

William Penn himself is reported to have stayed overnight in a Conestoga long house. “His willingness to lodge in a traditional Indian home made him unusual for a man of his stature” (77). Other Quakers and Moravians “were among the few people in English America who both extended hospitality to native people and accepted native generosity toward them” (79).

Indian women were another group with a positive influence on intercultural relationships. The Europeans were surprised to have native women involved in negotiations, because in their experience diplomacy was men’s work. “But in traditional Indian societies, women were an integral part of the decision-making process, and women continued to attend treaty conferences into the eighteenth century despite the objections by some colonial officials” (63).

Women helped to keep relationships more peaceful. “As long as

women remained deeply involved at every level of social interaction, there was peace; as women disappeared or were forced from such interaction, there was war” (65).

The state of Pennsylvania, which developed on land wrested from the Native Americans, became prosperous through agriculture, mining, and industry. Today all of these are impacted by outside pressures. Family farms, for example, are under threat from corporation farming and food imported from other states and countries.

The three-mile road on which my wife and I live once had six or more residential farms. Today the farming is done by farmers living off our road. Today Pennsylvania depends on military bases for employment and is seeking to expand gambling as a source of revenue.

Jeschke indicates that his book is addressed “primarily to North American Christians” in the hope that we might “discover the biblical paradigm of how to possess land. It is an invitation to examine salvation geography” (21). More specifically, “What does it mean to receive the promise of land, to inherit it, to be exiled from it, to return to it, to steward it, above all to sanctify it” (23).

He reviews the Hebrew conquest of the land under Joshua and finds him a less desirable model than Abraham. He suggests that the Jews actually came into their own during the

Babylonian captivity. Jeremiah urged them to “seek the welfare of the city where [the Lord has] sent you into exile” (Jer. 29:7). In the exile, Jeschke observes, the Jews developed a new vision. “Pushed beyond the horizons of the nation’s borders, Israel increasingly emphasized the truth of God as God of all the earth and of all the people, a God concerned for all the world’s salvation” (73).

“Christianity allied itself with nation-states and endorsed all too many national wars of conquest and defense.”

Christians, he observes, have been slow to learn the lesson of the exile. “Christianity allied itself with nation-states and endorsed all too many national wars of conquest and defense.” Then he comes to the American story, in relation to which he quotes Roy H. May:

“Pilgrims viewed the New World as the New Canaan. They were God’s chosen people headed for the Promised Land” (116).

Jeschke finds one example of colonizers who settled peacefully: Mennonites moving into the Paraguayan Chaco. “Although three Mennonites lost their lives in contact with the Indians, the settlers refused to retaliate or resort to violence. Instead, this immigrant community organized and developed a mission to the Indians, a program to employ Indians on Mennonite farms and industries, and also to settle Indians on farms themselves and offer them education and medical services.” No paradise, here, all agree, “but they are committed to a style of life I call salvation geography” (146).

He acknowledges that it usually does not work out like this. Violence is the common practice, and many will say he is naïve to propose an alternative. But, he asserts, “Predict and expect failure from the outset and that is exactly what we will get” (153). So his concept “salvation geography” is one to ponder.

My wife and I hold title to a small slice of land in Westmoreland County. It was not a gift, but the price was right. We were able to get a house erected on it, and we have room for a lawn, a garden, an orchard and even a small woodlot. We do not know how

the land was originally obtained, but we live near Jacobs Creek, said to be named after an Indian chief. We can imagine there could have been some unpleasantness involved, but we have no clear record.

But we try to live responsibly and take care of the land with a view to sometime passing it on to others who will cherish it. If land is a gift from God, we can do no less.

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



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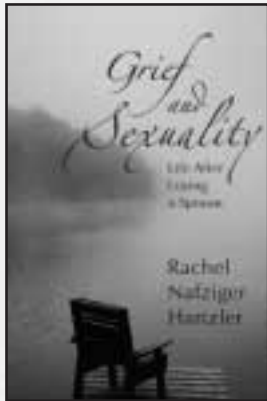
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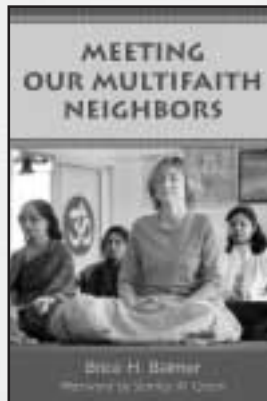
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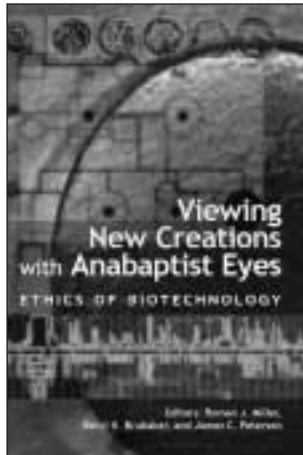


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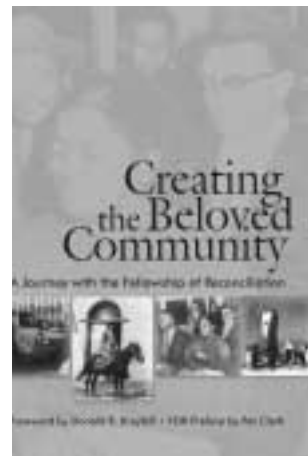
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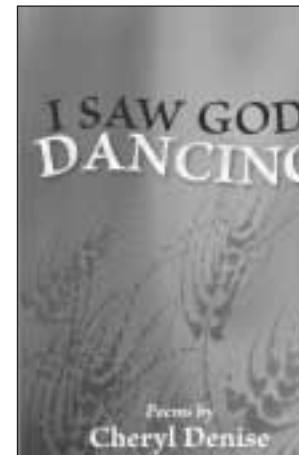
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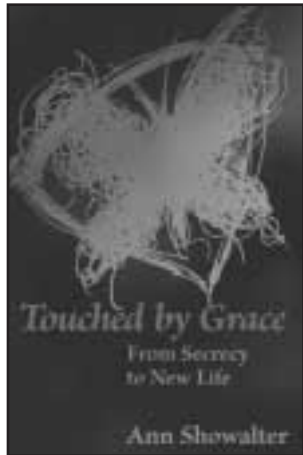
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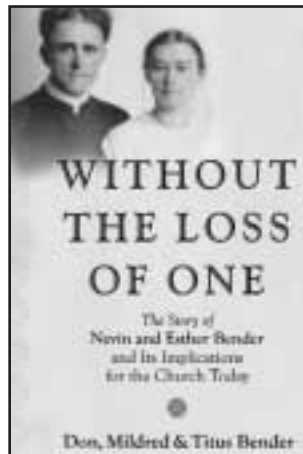
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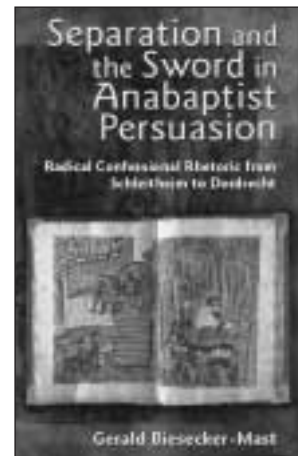


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Psalm to a Simple Supper

We came from our comfort to serve you
ham and canned green beans, cornbread and
black coffee. We came
in our used cars, passing you
on wide sidewalks. You made your way against
winter gusts and the steady tug of pride
to the old church basement where we'd look at you
through different windows, from distance
guarded.

We sing for you in the sanctuary, some
old familiar hymns, have
time to study the unwashed face, the aged
curve of your spine, decades of guilt burrowed
in your forehead, stories lodged unforgiving
between shoulder blades.

I am a good person, I tell myself as my
heart skips a beat when, after your
belly is full and fingers are once again
pink, you move to embrace me
much like a happy grandfather would. You are
a boy of seventeen as you
squeeze my cheek to yours. You are not
judging me while I am
taking in your rough, dirty stubble,
your mismatched wardrobe, the way your arms
remind me of a clinging scarecrow. You are calling me
Sweetheart, gently patting my hair, and I never
ask your name.

Somehow you know that
we came from our comfort to
give and go back quickly
into our worlds where smiles are not
toothless, where suppers are seldom simple.
Somehow you know
and forgive.

—*Rebecca Rossiter*