

DreamSeeker Magazine

Voices from the Soul



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Books, Faith, World & More

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Ink Aria

News to Me
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An Alternative Point of View: A Review of The Hutterites in North America

Marlin Jeschke

and much more

Winter 2011

Volume 11, Number 1; ISSN 1546-4172

Editorial: Shoots from the Stump

Mostly to my surprise, because I wasn't thinking in this direction until recently, this Winter 2011 issue of *DreamSeeker Magazine* forces me to reflect on endings and beginnings, on stumps and shoots. This is because this is the last issue to be published in a paper version. The online version may long continue; that will be determined by whether columns and articles continue to come in and the labor of love continues to have payoffs beyond the financial ones—of which there are less than zero!

Multiple factors have contributed to this decision, including the reality that *DSM* faces all the same challenges that have caused other periodicals to convert to online-only versions plus the fact that for its ten years *DSM* has always been published knowingly at a loss. Another factor has been my taking on the deanship of Eastern Mennonite Seminary (EMS). My original vision was to pay another editor entirely to replace me, but I concluded that for Cascadia Publishing House LLC, through which *DSM* is released, to take an even greater loss was not viable.

However, skipping paper to go straight to publishing online also skips considerable work and expense. And working with a faithful cadre of fine columnists is the least time-consuming part of editing *DSM*. Thus I suspect it may be viable, if *DSM*'s

columnists choose to remain active online, to continue to release their writing as the core of *DSM* while sometimes fleshing it out with other submissions.

I'm very pleased that my most recent effort to proactively invite author contributions led to Brenda Hartman-Souder's readiness to write a new column, "Five Hours East." But what an irony that it appears for the first time in this last paper issue of *DSM*. Nevertheless, I hope the treasures of Brenda's writing and insights will continue to be nurtured in *DSM* online (which has always served the greater number of *DSM* readers).

I'd note that tomorrow I happen to be preaching on Isaiah 11 and the shoot that sprouts from the stump of Jesse. In my sermon, I'll observe that like the redwoods whose ghostly stumps sprout majestic "fairy groves" or "cathedrals" of new shoots surrounding the stumps, life can sprout from destruction. And, as the sermon will put it,

This is a word we need to hear. Our culture mostly teaches us that life sprouts from life, that power sprouts from power, wealth from wealth, success from success. The biblical story overall, and the Isaiah imagery combined with the Jesus story sharply focuses

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Submissions

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

Subscriptions

Standard rates in U.S.
Paper subscriptions no longer available, information on Kindle potentially to come.

Free online:

www.CascadiaPublishingHouse.com/dsm

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

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ISSN: 1546-4172 (paper)
ISSN: 1548-1719 (online)

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this, offers us a different word.

In Isaiah the shoot comes from the stump. In the Jesus story, life comes from being hurt, oppressed, mistreated, undone by failure or even, as in Jesus' case, put to death.

As a good success-bent American, I'd rather speak of the glorious new future of *DSM*. But let me try to practice what I preach, and trust that turning the paper *DSM* into a stump gives those mysterious currents of divine energy the opportunity to nurture whatever new shoots might not otherwise emerge, whether from me, *DSM* online, or *DSM* readers.

I do want to express great gratitude to those of you, some thousand of you from what I can tell, who have faithfully sustained nearly a decade of paper *DSM*. And of course to the scores of you who have shown us, with laughter, tears, and passion, what writing as a "voice from the soul" can look like.

And then a business detail yet: This is the last issue of *DSM* because otherwise all the costs of annual *DSM* subscription renewals would need to be invested. Those of you whose subscriptions ran through 2010 will receive this as a final bonus issue. Those of you with whose subscriptions have a year or two to go are owed money. See form below to implement your choice of either receiving a refund check or twice the refund owed you in the form of credits to buy Cascadia books.

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Thanks again for being part of the *DreamSeeker Magazine* journey. I'll hope to continue to visit with you online. Happy shoot growing!

P.S. This issue ran weeks later than expected. One sad reason was the death of my mother, which I write about in my column at the end of this issue, was followed by my father Aaron's declining health. *DSM* went often on hold as we moved him to comfort care in late December and finally grieved his passing on January 3, 2011 even as at a January 7 service we also celebrated his life, which I'll say more about in months to come.

—Michael A. King

1972—*The Young Pastor Learns A Hard Lesson*

The chaplain, they told me at the front desk, was out sick. Would I be willing to talk to someone who was asking for a minister? He's on the third floor, they said, outside the ICU.

I found him pacing.

We exchanged greetings.

He was tall, stooped, in his seventies I guessed.

They were on "one of our trips," he said.

He had seen the signs to the hospital.

"Drove like a mad man. Got her here fast as I could."

He told me they were allowing him in to see her fifteen minutes every hour.

"Damn stupid rule," he said through gritted teeth.

"Got to wait for . . ." he checked his watch . . . "another thirty-five. But you . . .?"

He said it as a question.

I nodded. "Yes," I said. "Clergy privilege."

She lay inert, deathly still, her body trapped in tubes.

Her hair, bottle-orange atop her ashen face, struck me as grotesque.

I took a nurse aside.

"Her husband . . . well, he's all but frantic. Could he . . .?" I gestured at the bed.

She grimaced.

"He can come in for ten . . . no, five minutes. It won't be long . . ."

She left the rest unsaid.

I nodded, ran to bring him in.

He stood by her, leaning near her ear, cooing to a child.

It was too intimate to watch.

A doctor came, told me I should take him out.

I whispered him the message.

He shook his head at that, asked why.

I placed a hand on his arm, tugged gently.

He followed.



Outside the doors, he sank into a chair, wordless, dry-faced.
We waited, not long.
The doctor came to bring the news we knew he would.
He kept it brief, matter-of-fact.
He left.
Forrest—that was his name—glared at me, then roared.
“Why in hell did they—did you—make me leave?
I wanted to be there. I failed her.”

He did not ask for prayer.
I thanked God for that.

—*Ken Gible, retired Church of the Brethren pastor, is a Lancaster County native who gardens, teaches, and writes in Greencastle, Pennsylvania. You can visit his poetry blog at kenslines.blogspot.com.*

Parent Tune-Up

Brenda Hartman-Souder

The Casio digital keyboard—the one we bought in the States and paid extra shipping to fly to Nigeria—sits silent in our living room. But a tune of sadness mixed with tender understanding plays in my parenting heart when I glance to see it hidden under its handwoven-cloth shroud.

Since returning from a two-month home leave last summer, when their lessons necessarily ended, neither of my kids has once uncovered and plugged in the keyboard to sit down and put their hands to the keys. Since I have resigned from my position as The Motivating Force, they currently possess no interest in piano playing.

Even I, a mediocre pianist, am reluctant to play these days. The sound of music filling the room reminds me how I've failed to get the kids to enjoy this instrument and more, how in wishing keyboard competence for them, I neglected the finer points of parenting.

Early in my mothering journey, I was convinced that understanding basic theory and how to read music are practical and useful skills, ones that few people regret learning. They promote the ability to sing or play an instrument, even just for enjoyment, throughout life. And although not rigorous, research to prove

my point included conversations with many people who stated they wished their parents had “made” them take music lessons as a kid. I was confident that piano lessons would be one of those things that, with an occasional little positive push, my children would eventually pick up and run with.

Ha.

When Val was six, we signed her up for an innovative group music program that blended instruction in keyboard, rhythm instruments, and parental involvement. We bought an old, petite piano from a music-teaching friend we respected, who advised us back then, “Don’t let her quit taking lessons until she graduates from high school!”

Her dad was able to take off work early and provide the necessary parental accompaniment. A childhood without music lessons—he was too busy exploring the woods with his dog or building something with the neighbor boy—led him to find learning alongside Val novel and enjoyable. For two years, music lessons and practice included daddy and were fun!

When we moved to Nigeria, Val continued learning with Carolyn, a gentle and caring missionary mom. Greg started lessons with Carolyn too, and they went along well enough. Neither of our kids rushed to the piano after school to work on their scales and simple tunes, but with prodding they practiced enough to keep improving. After a while, Car-

olyn reported that Val’s playing skills were outstripping her teaching skills and that maybe we should look for a more advanced teacher.

We found Mr. Thomas who came to our house once a week for lessons and enthusiastically focused the kids on theory, finger strengthening exercises and technique. He pushed and encouraged them. He told us that in order for kids to excel they should practice an hour a day. Val and Greg responded to that with raised-eyebrow disbelief. We settled on half

of that amount of time.

While over the course of a school year, they both improved and played pieces of growing complexity and challenge and even occasionally reported “liking” lessons, their grumbling was the melody line I heard the clearest. They put off practicing until forced by threats from yours truly. And when they finally sat at the piano, their exercises were punctuated by irritatingly frequent 180-degree turns on the stool to look at the kitchen clock and estimate how many minutes were left in this excruciating activity I’d pushed them into.

Then we visited the USA for several months this summer, so the piano lessons ended. But my lessons as a parent did not.

First, our family hung out with some with musical friends who have musical children. When eight-year-old Tim sat down at the keys, we listened in astonishment. When

Their grumbling was the melody line I heard the clearest. They put off practicing until forced by threats from yours truly.

18-year-old Philippe improvised a jazz jam at his high school graduation party, we sat in awe. Clearly, these kids loved piano music and desired to excel . . . while our kids did not.

Next we ran into that old music teacher friend who had sold us our piano years ago. He rushed across the grocery store parking lot to greet us and then, without prompting, in the course of our brief conversation, volunteered new advice. It was something like this.

“I no longer push kids to keep taking lessons if they complain,” he said. “Now I tell parents to let them quit. Maybe they’ll come back in a year or two and be really ready to play; then the motivation will be theirs.”

My own childhood bears such wisdom out—how could I have forgotten? I’d dropped piano lessons, miserable and frustrated when the piano teacher unfavorably compared my skills to those of my sister, five years my elder and a natural musician. Awhile later I asked to restart, albeit with a different teacher. My parents wisely concurred, and I was a piano student for nine more years.

The real problem, however, is my anxiety that my children, living in Nigeria for almost six years, will be seen as odd and not quite up to snuff when they return to the States. Kids there seem programmed pretty much full-time to participate in a whole smorgasbord of after-school activities. Val and Greg attend a fine international school, but extracurricular offerings are limited. How will my kids fare when most of their childhood was spent simply being kids?

With a silent piano, however, I am beginning to understand that my children are perfectly capable of singing their own songs. Other music fills our home.

Valerie thrives on the challenge of school and never needs to be nagged to complete homework. She reads at night, and listens to music or books on her iPod while washing the supper dishes, crocheting, or weaving friendship bracelets. She’s mastered crepes and French toast. She nurtures a small circle of friends and loves the ability to travel with us and live in another country. And she’s chosen to play clarinet in the middle school band; the skill came easily because of those piano lessons. Val practices exactly 20 minutes a day, the magic number needed to earn an A.

Greg draws, reads voraciously, and is constantly curious about things like animation, video photography, how things work, building stuff from household objects, and what it’s like to be famous, like the president of the United States. We have the first draft of his inaugural speech in hand, along with numerous action-packed stories. He runs though our compound with Nigerian age-mates finding fun without toys. When the mood strikes and dry season arrives, he takes a basketball to the cracked court and shoots the ball through the rusty hoop over and over again.

Isn’t this music enough?

Twice a year, their school holds a recital for all piano students taking lessons from various community and mission teachers. Proud parents fill

the front rows with cameras poised, the young performers are jittery in their seats, and clapping after each piece is boisterous and prolonged.

We won't be at the recitals this year, and I can't help but wonder how many children love piano or merely play out of dutiful love for parents who need them to play. Because I've been there. And part of me would still like to be there.

But we will attend the middle school band program to hear Val and eat her crepes with relish. And we'll continue to read Greg's new stories

and mount his intricate drawings on the fridge and office walls.

Stay tuned. . . .

—*Brenda Hartman-Souder, Jos, Nigeria, serves as co-representative of Mennonite Central Committee Nigeria and, along with spouse Mark, as parent of Valerie and Greg. This is her first entry as a regular writer of her new DreamSeeker Magazine column, "Five Hours East," which refers to the time zone difference between the eastern U.S. and Nigeria.*

Baneful Blessing

On Saturdays in summer
my father worked at the feed
mill till twelve. At the noon
meal (we called it dinner)
he would sometimes graft
onto his usual table grace
a phrase I learned to dread,
a red flag warning that
the rest of my day would
not be spent playing baseball.

I believed then and believe
still he was addressing
me more than God or at
least it was fifty-fifty:

" . . . and Lord we thank Thee
for the privilege of working."

—*Ken Gibble*

Windowless Rooms

Stephen Mitchell

I rarely enter the teacher workroom at my school. It is small, windowless, and white, lit by four-foot fluorescent bulbs that cast a pale, cold light. In the wintry chill I am never at ease. Recently though, I went in to make photo copies. On the counter lay an evangelical magazine open to an article that read "Shattered to Share." Scanning just a few lines confirmed my suspicions. The author was trying to answer that age-old question: why do the innocent suffer?

His story was tame. A hooligan had thrown a rock through his windshield. He called a glazier, had the window repaired, and told the man about Jesus. Then he had an epiphany! This was the reason God had allowed his window to be broken: So he could tell another soul about Jesus!

Then he had another epiphany: Here too was the reason for so much of the suffering in this world. In essence, if not in word, he declared that God kills the children of his followers, strikes wives and husbands with cancer, destroys cities in earthquakes, and wreaks general havoc with human lives so that believers can tell non-believers about Jesus. That's it—that's the meaning of suffering.

I do not accept this answer. It is too easy and feels like the gates of a prison shutting me in. How do I es-

cape or resist suffering that happens for a good reason? Am I really to conclude that between the inconvenience of a shattered windshield and the wracking death of a cancer victim there is an unbroken continuum with differences only of degree? Or is there not a world—perhaps a nasty one—lying between broken glass and broken bodies, between shattered windows and shattered lives or crippled psyches?

The author of “Shattered to Share” didn’t think so. Nor is he alone. In a recent chapel service at my Christian high school, a visiting minister told the students that God brings them suffering for one of two reasons.

(1) To teach them patience.

(2) To prepare them to help another through suffering.

I thought of the two girls in the audience whose mothers had died of cancer that year. I thought of my mother-in-law whose life was ebbing away as cancerous growths attacked breast, bone, brain, lungs, and liver. I wondered how anyone could ask these women to love a God who would act like this. Wouldn’t it make more sense—given the power we typically ascribed to him—for God to stop the suffering rather than add to it?

Yet this pastor was in fine company. We can go back at least as far as the book of Job to find pious explanations. Job’s friends come to help him, to comfort him, to endure his trial with him. But they end up blaming him for his suffering. Well-intended though they are, each claims a wisdom no one really possesses—the

wisdom to explain this world’s inscrutable ways.

Answering the question is tempting though. Even the great theologians have braved it. In *The City of God*, St. Augustine declares that the Christian women raped by barbarian invaders were allowed to suffer because they were too proud of their own virginity. God—in his graciousness—was humbling them.

Theologians as fine as Augustine make me uneasy. I wonder if his genius perceives something I’ve missed. But though he troubles me, I insist that on this occasion he has not spoken well of God.

Some 1500 years later, Dostoevsky resisted similar consolations. The character speaking is Ivan who refuses to accept that suffering in this world serves some purpose. If it does, that purpose is cruel—just as cruel as any purpose for which I might choose to make another suffer. Both Ivan (who rejects God) and Alyosha (who embraces him) know this.

“Imagine,” says Ivan,

“that you are creating a fabric of human destiny with the object of making men happy in the end, giving them peace and rest at last, but that it was essential and inevitable to torture to death only one [innocent human] . . . would you consent to be the architect on those conditions? . . . “No, I wouldn’t consent,” said Alyosha softly.” (*The Brothers Karamazov*, Barnes and Noble Classics, 2004, 227)

So the Christian joins the rebel to protest injustice and the false consolations that claim to know why we suffer. Ivan’s protest is all the more powerful because he does not dally in the realm of the inconvenient—the realm of shattered car windows—but goes to the heart of the real question: the gratuitous suffering of children—murder, abuse, torture.

Did God allow the Russian nobleman in Dostoevsky’s story to set his dogs upon an eight-year old boy so that the boy could later testify to the love of Jesus? The boy died. Did he do it so the mother could—the mother who was forced to watch?

Do we dare to answer? A *yes* would be arrogant and ridiculous; a *no* would land us back into the realm of meaningless suffering, that horror from which we hide—often, according to Camus, behind shoddy reasons.

“A world that can be explained even with bad reasons is a familiar world. But, on the other hand, in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger” (Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, Vintage International, 1983, 6).

Is this the reason we explain suffering? Because meaningless evil is too haunting?

If so, are we speaking as Christians when we insist that God has good reasons for suffering? Or have we disguised as piety what are constructions

of our human wills—windowless rooms erected to hide the horror of evil? Is the Christian hope founded upon the promise of a good explanation for suffering as if we will exclaim “Oh, that’s why my daughter was raped! Good thinking, God!”?

Isn’t the Christian hope founded, instead, on the promise that suffering will be abolished, that its absurdity will be resolved not into a meaningful plan but by banishment when God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes?

Camus, rejecting reason, turns to will to cope with the darkness of this world. From now on humans must create their own meaning, pushing their unbearable rocks up the mountain: “Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates gods and raises rocks. *He too concludes that all is well* [emphasis mine]. . . . The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man’s heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy” (123).

Like Sisyphus, the author of “Shattered to Share” concludes that all is well. Admitting that Christians live by hope, he claims, nonetheless, to discern the reason for what happened to him and claims his explanation as part of his faith. One must imagine *him* happy.

But it isn’t faith and it isn’t happy.

To grasp after some reason, to bring some measure of understanding to an experience of horror is to foray into the unknown. They are our best efforts to make our own meaning. But

When we insist that God has good reasons for suffering . . . have we disguised as piety what are constructions of our human wills. . . ?

reasons for suffering justify that suffering. They imply that what happened was really okay. Ultimately, they deny the evil of evil. Such reasons are no great insult when they explain a shattered window; they are cruel when they try to explain a shattered life.

Still, I've not suffered all that much. The darkest time of my life was the depression I lived with in college. It followed on the heels of romantic heartbreak. I thought I loved a girl who was certain she did not love me. Convinced that I would never recover, I lurked about in an indignant gloom for a year and a half, writing wretched poetry and recording long, introspective journal entries about my meaningless life. I revived long enough to fall in love with another girl who was as firmly convinced as the last that she did not love me. Though all of this is quite common, I *felt* abandoned by the world and by God, trapped in a universe that thwarted my grasp after meaning.

During that time I got, in a manner of speaking, very religious. I wondered why God allowed my hopes to be dashed, why he kept me from the girl I loved. I read the Psalms, Job, Camus, and Dostoevsky, looking for some answer to the mystery of evil. I asked God what he was trying to teach me and assured myself that he had some great plan for my life.

Really, though, none of this mattered. Deep down, I wanted neither a reason for my loneliness nor whatever good might come of it. Rather, I wanted it to end. The only thing close to consolation was the hope that I

would someday be loved back. It is Alyosha's hope in the resurrection. It is Job's cry for a mediator who can take hold of God and man.

Neither reason nor will can account for our lives. We need something more. No world whose meaning rests wholly upon human shoulders or whose purpose can be fully and finally named has room enough for the human soul. An existentialist like Camus could make his own meaning—though he had to do so without recourse to a cosmic reason. And what he made was all the meaning for which he could hope, a windowless room lit by the pale weak light of human will.

But Christians cannot remain in this or any other room, for the meaning of our lives lies in the mouth of God. That meaning remains open, unspoken, and unfinished, while we remain people of hope, not people of reason or will.

Our world has been terribly shattered. Though we sometimes love one another despite its cracks, we are not shattered in order to share. I will never slap my forehead and exclaim over the brilliance or beauty of a cosmic plan that requires someone to drop bombs, rape women, or abuse children. I *hope* to see the end of these things and the deep wounds they leave on our world healed.

—*Stephen Mitchell lives with his wife and two children in Mount Holly, North Carolina, where he reads, gardens, teaches English, and tries (with occasional success) not to darken counsel by words without knowledge.*

You Will Be My Witnesses

James C. Longacre

In an ordinary week, with how many persons do you speak? We might start with counting the check-out persons at Henning's Market, the neighbors next door, the colleagues at work. Would it be fifty? One hundred? Several hundred?

What is our testimony, our witness in our daily interactions with the many persons we engage in our weekly routines?

Witness, evangelism—the topic stirs up a variety of thoughts, does it not? We know we ought to do it, right? But we are afraid, do not know how, feel clumsy.

We have mixed feelings about those who give witness aggressively. The Jehovah's Witnesses are not our favorite visitors. We admire from a distance the dedication of the Mormons, but we are not sure we want to copy their methods.

A number of you remember the days of door-to-door tract distribution. Did you not generally go to places out of your own community, go down the streets and insert tracts in the doors, and move on—hopefully before anyone came to the door?

Many of us have not been fully comfortable with confrontational approaches such as “If you died tonight, would you go to heaven or hell?”

Knowing what not to do, and how not to witness, many or even perhaps most of us, conclude that witness and evangelism is not our gift. Some have that gift, but it is not ours.

Another way to sidestep this issue of witness is to suggest that we will let our lives speak. It is good, of course, for lives to do their own form of speaking. But some words added to the witness of our lives would be much better.

The Scriptures do suggest that we are all called to be witnesses. The great commission given to the disciples and, we believe, to us, is to—“Go . . . and make disciples of all nations. . . .” In John’s Gospel, these were the words of Jesus to the disciples after his resurrection: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” So to suggest that to witness is not our gift is to weasel out of our calling.

Perhaps we view witness too much as obligation. It is the good deed that we have to do. It’s like as children taking cod liver oil—it tasted terrible, but it was good for you, so you did it.

Did you notice the text read from Acts 1? Does the text say, “You *must* be my witnesses. . . .”? No, the text reports that the Holy Spirit will come and “you *will* be my witnesses. . . .” Witness is not obligation—rather, it is explanation, it is testimony. Peter wrote in his letter to the early congregation: “Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from

you an accounting for the hope that is in you. . . .” (1 Pet. 3:15b-16a).

Testimony is explanation of what makes us tick, why we live the way we do, how we explain our priorities, what it is that gives us joy, and so much more.

So then what do we say? To what do we give witness? Drawing from the text read, let me suggest several out of many possible ways to witness.

The writer of Psalm 145 put it in verse 6 like this: “The might of your awesome deeds shall be proclaimed, and I will declare your greatness.” We give witness to the beauty and grandeur all around us. We live with what one writer calls an “abiding astonishment.” Wonder, awe, adoration characterize our lives and our words. Worship is not simply a Sunday morning activity. Worship is a weeklong disposition.

Quite a few years ago the New Testament scholar J. B. Phillips wrote a book entitled *Your God Is Too Small*. It seems to me that for many of our time the world is too small. There is a kind of thinness in people’s lives. So we give testimony to the expansiveness of life, the beauty of our world, the amazing complexity of God’s creation.

With better telescopes and microscopes, what do scientists see but more complexity, additional beauty, amazing symmetry and balance, and so much more? So we give witness regularly and consistently to beauty, to what is good, to the richness of life, to the experiences and possibilities of joy. Thankfulness, wonder, praise are the demeanor of our lives. To be sure,

on certain days we might sing the songs of lost love, disappointment, and more, but most of the time our song is that “This Is My Father’s World.”

In our looking for beauty and goodness, let us not overlook each other. Amid some continuing differences of opinion here, some of us have been a little too hard on each other. We would do well to delight a bit more in each other’s goodness.

Second, in our actions and words we give witness to the faith through our sharing Jesus’ concerns. Our attention is consistently turned toward the vulnerable, the rejected, the neglected, those on the lower rungs of the economic ladder, the underprivileged. We treat with equal respect those whose names are honored and those quite nameless.

Thus, the checkout persons at the grocery store, the bank teller, the cleaning women—frequently persons of color still too often not accorded full dignity in our culture—in the hotels and motels are all seen as persons of dignity and worth and are treated as such. In our words of love, acceptance, and care we give testimony of God’s love and compassion.

Painted on the rock ledges along highways from time to time we see words placed there by someone who obviously risked their safety to climb there to paint. The letters are often not even, the paint ran a bit. But the words are striking: “Jesus Saves.” Sometimes in earlier years I wondered whether that was really the best way to

give witness to the faith. Would people know what it meant? Would not more information be necessary? Perhaps so.

But we can fill out that brief message in our testimony, our witness. The message that we can offer gently or boldly, directly or indirectly, in lengthy conversation or over coffee, is that Jesus saves us from paths in life that simply go round and round. Jesus saves us from false gods. Jesus saves us from false promises. Jesus saves us from fear. Jesus calls us to visions bold and meaningful.

Now a word on the “how to” of our witness, the style of our testimony.

First, let us always recognize that we are not the ones called upon to convert others. We are to bear witness. It is the Spirit who calls.

So we do not give in to manipulation. We do not impose our views. We do not suggest that we are superior. Earlier I quoted from 1 Peter the Scripture that encourages us always to be ready to give an accounting for the hope that is in us. The text then adds the words, “yet do it with gentleness and reverence” (1 Pet. 3:16).

We are not called upon to argue down another. We are not directed to have the last word. We offer testimony.

In our witness we most often listen before we speak. We listen with Spirit-led ears and minds to hear what is behind the observations, questions, complaints, fears of others.

We treat with equal respect those whose names are honored and those quite nameless.

And we realize that not every occasion, not every conversation is the appropriate time for giving testimony. We are quite sensitive to the ebb and flow of people's lives. What is on their hearts and minds is what is of interest to us. It is not that on a given day we have a given number of persons to whom we must witness.

Jesus did not invite himself to lunch with every tax collector. But when he saw Zachaeus up in a tree, that provided the opportunity for inviting himself to the house of Zachaeus for lunch.

In our openness to the Spirit we sense when to speak.

In our witness and testimony we want to leave in people's minds that thought that lingers, the expression that has encouraged and honored them. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians that "we are not peddlers of God's Word like so many, but in Christ we speak as persons of sincerity, as persons sent from God and standing in his presence." Earlier in the text Paul used the memorable imagery that "we are the aroma of Christ."

Have you ever listened to the program *Car Talk* on National Public Radio? You can call in your particular problem with your car, and these two humorous brothers seek to provide an answer.

Some years ago my brother Paul was on the program with his problem. It was actually a problem with my truck and my stock trailer. It was my

problem, but my brother was on this national program.

I'll not go into the problem discussed. But the discussion went back and forth between my brother and these two gentlemen: "What do you haul in the trailer? How far do you travel?" On and on.

When the conversation had ended, and Paul was off the air, the one brother said to the other, "You know, that Paul seems like a nice guy. He seems like the kind of guy you would like to sit on the porch with and smoke a cigar."

At the conclusion of our witness, the next day, or the next week, that (maybe without the cigar!) is what we hope for: that a person will say, "You know, I would like to know more, to be with that person again. Something there looks inviting."

We are the aroma of Christ. Now that is a privilege.

— *For forty years James C. Longacre, Barto, Pennsylvania, has served the Mennonite church in congregational, district, and national leadership roles. His preaching has had a prophetic edge and his church leadership a visionary perspective. Currently Longacre farms and serves congregations as visiting preacher and teacher. This sermon, based on Psalm 145:4-7; Luke 4:14-21; Acts 1:6-8 is drawn from his book, Like Those Who Dream: Sermons for Salford Mennonite Church and Beyond (Cascadia, 2009).*



An Alternative Point of View

Reviews of All Governments Lie and of An American in Persia

Daniel Hertzler

All Governments Lie: The Life and Times of Rebel Journalist I. F. Stone, by Myra MacPherson. Scribners, 2008.

An American in Persia: A Pilgrimage to Iran, by Richard A. Kauffman. Cascadia Publishing House, 2010.

How do we know what is going on? Some things we see with our own eyes. On occasion these things are such that we can hardly believe our eyes. At other times we are informed by hearsay or gossip. We have learned to be cautious about such reports although there is a biblical reference which calls for taking seriously "two or three witnesses" (Deut. 19: 15).

Then, of course, there are the professional news purveyors: newspapers, radio, television, known collectively as "the media." They inform us about what is going on throughout the world, generally focusing on the more sensational occurrences. That something has happened we seldom doubt, but we're not always sure

about the significance of what is reported.

I read daily and weekly newspapers for local news, I read *Newsweek* and follow NBC, a standard news source. Yet *Newsweek* was recently sold to a private party and NBC is owned by an organization which probably has an ax to grind. Indeed the Public Broadcasting System, which is supposed to be independent, accepts support from an oil company and the military industrial complex.

I also read *The Nation* and other alternative publications. *The Nation* claims that “nobody owns The Nation” although I have seen it carry cigarette advertising on occasion. I also read several newsletters including *The Washington Spectator*, which records news I seldom if ever find in the general media.

All Governments Lie is a biography of I. F. Stone described as a “Rebel Journalist” who was not satisfied with public statements but dug out facts behind the statements which sometimes did not support them. This is a “womb to tomb” biography beginning with Stone’s birth to Jewish parents in 1907 and continuing to his death in 1989 at the age of 81.

At his birth he was named Isador Feinstein, but at the age of 30 he changed it to I. F. Stone, evidently in an effort to get away from racial profiling (115). Nevertheless throughout the book he is frequently referred to as

“Izzy.” The development of the biography is essentially chronological. However, although the five parts are chronological, within the parts are topical chapters and we may need to refer back to the part to see where we are in Stone’s life.

All Governments Lie is a biography of I. F. Stone described as a “Rebel Journalist” who was not satisfied with public statements but dug out facts behind the statements. . . .

Having once been an editor, I was interested in the publications Stone worked for, but this is evidently not the author’s primary interest. She is more concerned about Stone as a person and the development of his thinking so the publications serve only as vehicles of expression.

With help from the index, which is quite extensive, I was able to find a record of publications he served during his professional life. Actually, he began independently. At the age of 14 he published his own newspaper, *The Progress*, where he wrote, “To stay in power has become the fundamental purpose of the Democratic and Republican parties. . . . Parties are no longer the organ of a part of the people, they have simply become hereditary things like blue eyes and cancer” (30). This is an example of the point of view he was to represent throughout his years as a journalist.

The Feinsteins lived in Camden, New Jersey, and at 15 Izzy was hired by L. David Stern, publisher of the *Camden Courier Post*. After the *Courier Post* he would work for Stern on the *Philadelphia Record* and then the *New York Post*. Finally, in 1939, af-

ter more than 15 years, the two separated in conflict over Stone’s editorial position regarding the finances of the New York transit system. Stone was always pushing his point of view so there was tension between the journalist and the publisher from time to time and when Stern published his autobiography he did not mention Stone (61).

During his years on Stern’s publications, Izzy had followed various political, social, and economic issues, always coming out on the side of the oppressed. Soon after leaving the *Post*, Stone became employed by *The Nation* and moved his family to Washington D.C.. In 1929 he had married Esther Roisman. They were to have three children and she became a stabilizing factor for her husband who in his professional life was always involved in conflict.

Beginning in 1936, Stone editorialized against the FBI and so became a subject for surveillance at least until the death of J. Edgar Hoover in 1972. “Stone kept the FBI busy throughout the ’40s; he was now speaking to every left-wing audience and writing for not one, but two ‘subversive publications’” (194).

The second subversive publication was *PM*, which began in 1940. This “was a tabloid that refused to pander: there were no racing sheets, no stockmarket reports, no pictures of stripteasers being hauled off to jail” (196). It “often scored in crusades that mainstream, corporate-friendly newspapers largely ignored. . . . *PM* attacked segregation and lynchings like no other newspaper catering to

white audiences” (197). It was to last until 1948.

After this Stone wrote for the *Daily Compass*, which went under in 1952. So in 1953 he began his own newsletter, the *I. F. Stone’s Weekly*. “When Stone started the *Weekly* in 1953, Hoover was apoplectic, going through tortured motions to subscribe without Stone knowing. . . . An FBI memo stated that ‘extensive investigation has failed to establish any espionage activity, on part of subject and has established no C[ommunist] P[arty] activity on his part’” (290).

Stone’s *Weekly* would last until 1971, nearly 20 years, and would eventually become a profitable enterprise. Stone’s periodical publications were a major source of contact with the public, but he also would make speeches and write books.

At one point Stone “summarized what he was fighting for: civil liberty, free speech, peace in the world, truth in government, and a humane society” (246). With such a broad platform and an aggressive, personal style, Stone was bound to face opposition. In the ’40s he began to oppose the Truman administration, whose “executive order, signed on March twenty-first, 1947, went against all tenets of the American Constitution, leading to the persecution of thoughts, not deeds” (247).

He opposed the Korean War and wrote a book, *The Hidden History of the Korean War*, for which he had trouble finding a publisher. But “Historians continue to cite Stone for correctly challenging the dominant view of Western scholars that China joined

the Korean War as part of a well-ordered monolithic plot to rule the world” (269).

In the meantime “The FBI, CIA, the Army, the State Department, and the U.S. Postal Service relentlessly tracked Stone across the United States and Europe” (287). Even after his death, right wing columnist Robert Novak charged that “Izzy Stone was a lifelong Soviet apologist ‘who received secret payments from the Kremlin.’ Both were old and patent lies, and Novak certainly had to know this” (311).

In 1956 Stone visited Russia and discontinued support of communism, which he had favored because of his concern for justice to the downtrodden, although he had never joined the party. “He wrote a strongly confessional column which cost the financially strapped journalist four hundred subscribers” (349).

Stone weighed in on behalf of the civil rights struggle. He supported Muhammad Ali and Martin Luther King Jr. in their opposition to the Vietnam War. When Lyndon Johnson became president, Stone was in favor of him until the escalation of the Vietnam War. “Stone dedicated himself to an all-out crusade for peace, saw Johnson as a duplicitous warmonger and Humphrey as a fallen hero and faithful lapdog to L. B. J.” (390).

Stone’s opposition to policies that the mainstream media were reluctant to oppose made him for a time a pariah with other reporters. But eventually they began to recognize what Victor Navasky has observed, that “Izzy saw what others missed, even

though it was often in plain sight” (446).

The book goes beyond Stone’s life to comment on the role of the media regarding the war in Iraq. It quotes Daniel Ellsberg, who said, “Nobody has learned anything from the Pentagon Papers, Vietnam, Izzy or anything. . . . I am puzzled by the degree of servility and compliance from the press” (456).

And so I wonder what was accomplished by an iconoclast such as Stone. Did anything change for the better? A summary of Stone’s influence appears in *The Nation* (Oct. 4, 2010). Stone is included as No. 26 in a list of “The Fifty Most Influential Progressives of the Twentieth Century.” The list begins with Socialist Eugene Debs and ends with Michael Moore. Other “worthies” include Eleanor Roosevelt, Pete Seeger, and Martin Luther King Jr. Of Stone it says that he “was an investigative journalist whose persistent research uncovered government corruption and wrongdoing. . . . He inspired generations of muckraking reporters” (17).

So he has had an ongoing influence. And I keep reading *The Washington Spectator* and other alternative publications. They provide background information on subjects and issues I never find covered by NBC.

After I had written this review I came upon I. F. Stone’s *Polemics and Prophecies 1969-1970* (Little, Brown and Company, 1970), a compilation of his writing from this period. I found a number of the essays responding to governmental obfuscation during the Vietnam War. Unless

one is studying the politics of that period, these may not be of interest except as samples of Stone’s style. However, essays on the Democratic and Republican parties illustrate Stone’s contention that the parties are too similar to be of much help to the poor and downtrodden.

Another theme that seems unfortunately timeless is “The Need for Double Vision in the Middle East” where Stone wrote, “So long as a million Palestinians live in homeless misery there will be no peace for Israel, and there should be no peace of mind for world Jewry. This is a wrong we must right” (437). The essay was written in 1969, but the stalemate continues.

The book *Polemics and Prophecies 1969-1970* is filled with pungent writing of this sort, but unless we are studying issues of this period we will find the biography more useful.

Richard A. Kauffman has gone to Iran and has written a book. He spent two weeks there as part of a Menonite Central Committee study group. MCC has been active in Iran since an entry following an earthquake in 1990 (51). Based on wording by one of his speech writers, George W. Bush labeled Iran part of an “axis of evil.” Kauffman found most of the people he met there friendly toward Americans and puzzled by Bush’s lumping them with Iraq and North Korea, neither of which is on Iran’s list of favorite countries.

Kauffman’s book is an “I was there” presentation based on a two-week experience, and we should not expect comprehensive coverage, although there is a three page list of “Further Resources” at the end of the book. So we assume that he has informed himself about the background issues involved, although the book is mainly a journalist’s account of people he met on a two-week tour and what they told him.

His experiences in Iran were mainly positive, although they began negatively when he and James Cooper had trouble passing through immigration. Officials evidently perceived that Cooper’s beard and conservative dress along with Kauffman’s name may have indicated that they were Jewish. When it finally became clear that they were not Jewish, they were admitted.

In contrast to this chilly reception, most Iranians they met were friendly and “didn’t see any reason why Iranians and Americans could not be friends. But they sometimes asked us difficult questions.” Some of them “dared to ask why Americans hate Iranians, or why Christians hate Muslims” (34). A young woman said that “Iran is a complex country. And so are the people.” Kauffman adds, “Indeed the country is a complex place, as complex as a Persian rug. It is also a place of contradictions” (37). This is in contrast to the one-note music we generally hear about Iran from the American media.

Kauffman’s book is an “I was there” presentation based on a two-week experience. . . .”

In a brief chapter (all the chapters are brief) Kauffman describes the work of Mennonite Central Committee in Iran. It has worked through the Iranian Red Crescent Society, and a picture with the chapter shows a hydrotherapy machine bought from France with money from MCC.

The next chapter tells of pressures the Iranians put on minority groups such as Jews and Christians. Kauffman also observes here as he does throughout the book, how the Americans criticized their own government but an Iranian professor they met would not criticize his. Perhaps he felt the need to be careful.

Chapter 13 reviews the sad story of U.S. and Iranian history: how a coup sponsored by the CIA in 1953 brought down a democratically elected government and put the Shah back in power. The question is how many Americans remember or even have heard about this unpleasant occurrence and how it contributed to the taking of U.S. hostages by the Iranians.

In an Afterword Kauffman re-

ports on contacts made since his trip. "I've heard from several of my Iranian contacts. They are quite anxious about their future. They expressed deep longing for peace. And they request our prayers as sons and daughters of our common spiritual ancestor, Father Abraham" (109).

Kauffman is a senior editor on the staff of *The Christian Century*. In the issue of June 27, 2008, he published an article, "Inside Iran" which covers the gist of his book. This back issue of the magazine is not available to most of us and so the book serves as a useful summary of current issues in Iran.

Like *The Washington Spectator*, *An American in Persia* does not try to cover the big picture. But it includes a series of little pictures which if taken seriously could soften relations between our two countries. I believe I will donate my copy to the Scottsdale library.

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



News to Me

Renee Gehman

"Does anyone have any news to share? Lilian?"

"Tomorrow's my sister's birthday."

"Robert?"

"Yesterday I got a job in the Homework Room. I got to sharpen all the pencils."

"Briana?"

"Yesterday the dentist came to the Boys and Girls Club and put a pasta on my teeth."

"A pasta?"

"Yeah, a special pasta, and now my teeth are going to be healthy for ten years."

As others are reading their *Inquirers*, *Posts*, and *Journals*, I get the daily news sitting "crisscross-apple-sauce" in a circle on the rug. Untainted by political leanings or obligations to financial supporters, every second grader may report on one item they deem newsworthy. Here, in my opinion, are five minutes well-spent, offering in various cases entertainment or a chance to offer a clarification for a Spanish-speaking student ("I think you meant *paste*, Briana"); but in all cases a glimpse of the lives and values of seventeen children.

When I was that age, I opened the newspaper only as often as it featured coloring or writing contests for kids. It wasn't until middle school that I recall a heightened sense of urgency to follow the news. "Current events" was the term used; "*You've got to read 'current events' articles!*" was the clarion call of the teachers. For science it was five articles read and five responses written each quarter. Gone as into a black hole are the memories of the scientific breakthroughs I read of; what remains is that here is where I first really felt that the news—for whatever reason—must be important.

In high school, appeals to students to read or watch the news escalated. Bonus questions on un-news-related quizzes awarded extra points to those who kept up with the week's top news stories in addition to homework and studies. Teachers referred to news stories of the past and were mortified to find we didn't know about the *Challenger* and more.

Feeling occasional pangs of guilt on behalf of my uninformed generation, I dabbled in the evening news on TV and tried reading the newspaper. The bleakness on TV and blackness on my fingers post-paper reading were just a couple deterrents to any anticipated success I hoped to garner from these efforts.

Through high school, college, and beyond, the pattern of feeling guilty for not showing enough care for current events and then trying to care and then failing to keep up with news-reading went on.

At one point, in desperation to Do the Right Thing, I registered to vote

and determined that I was going to follow the presidential election campaign and become a socially responsible citizen by being an informed voter. I read articles, watched TV, researched the validity of forwarded emails, and let casual conversations turn into debate with others on political hot buttons. I felt genuinely passionate emotions towards injustice and uninformed speakers-on-politics-who-really-only-parroted-one-biased-news-source like I never had before.

But after I voted, I looked back on my efforts and realized I still hated politics and still didn't *really* care to know anything about any of it, mostly because, as the book reviewed by Daniel Hertzler in this issue states, all governments lie, and I find that overwhelming. A cringe accompanies this confession, because I know many would consider this outlook irresponsible and perhaps rightly so.

I continue to wrestle with questions of keeping up with news and current events—should I try harder again? Ought I to read a newspaper every day (or at least every week)? Should I take upon myself more social responsibility when it comes to news of injustice around the world? What's a realistic amount of effort and care? Is it enough, when there are people who have trouble even finding clean drinking water, that I mostly just concern myself with the news of my students, who have a water fountain in the classroom and sometimes throw away whole cartons of apple juice and milk at lunch?

Are we called to "the news" on different levels? Some seem to be great with politics, some with huge issues like religious persecution or corrupt governments or human trafficking.

Some can remember who's who in national and global politics. I recall an Australian woman with a particularly strong character who once voiced to me her disgust at the fact that so few Americans seemed able to name the prime minister of Australia! I nodded and listened empathetically, all the while sending her telepathic extortions to not ask *me* if I knew, and thank goodness she did *not!*

(By the way, it was John Howard at the time, and then Kevin Rudd, and now Julia Gillard. I only know any of that because I just searched the Internet.)

Are we called to "the news" on different levels?

Right now (and this may change) I'm feeling at peace with a smaller scale of news—news from the kids at my school who qualify for free lunches or who don't know English very well, or who go home to babysitters every night because moms or dads work the night shift, or who have easy, happy-go-lucky lives. Crisscross-applesauce on the rug in a circle. *That* is news to me.

—Renee Gehman, Souderton, Pa., is assistant editor, Dreamseeker Magazine, and ESL teacher. She has enjoyed the Dreamseeker Magazine print version, which has never left her with blackened fingers, and looks forward to keeping up with the news and reflections to be offered in Dreamseeker online.



An Alternative Point of View

A Review of The Hutterites in North America

Marlin Jeschke

The Hutterites in North America, by Rod Janzen and Max Stanton. The John Hopkins University Press, 2010.

We get many books about the Amish, not many about the Hutterites. Granted, the Amish community now numbers close to a quarter million, the Hutterites only close to 50,000. And it depends where you live. Amish settlements are concentrated in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Indiana. Three-quarters of Hutterite colonies are in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and British Columbia, with a third in North and South Dakota, Montana, Minnesota, and Washington state.

Hutterites came to North America in 1874 from Ukraine, the same time as the first wave of Mennonites from Ukraine, where Mennonites had helped them resettle after Hutterites had been persecuted in the Balkans nearly to extinction. The first settlements of Hutterites in America were all located in South Dakota, where some homesteaded on individual farms, like other pioneers, while others resumed

colony life, identifying themselves by three leaders: Lehrerleut, Dariusleut, and Schmiedeleut (Leut being simply the German word for people).

Most non-colony Hutterites went Mennonite, while colony Hutterites have continued to exist in their three denominations, except for a split in the 1990s that divided the Schmiedeleut into two groups, which our authors call Schmiedeleut One and Schmiedeleut Two. Schmiedeleut One consists of those who adopted some progressive measures under the influence of the Bruderhof community of the eastern U.S., and Schmiedeleut Two consists of those who resisted that influence.

Sociologist John Hostetler, along with Trudy Huntington, wrote a book on the Hutterites first published back in 1967, so this book by Janzen and Stanton is a welcome updating. While several beginning chapters in this study cover Hutterite history, the later chapters describe the life and faith of the about 500 colonies (and counting) scattered across the northern prairies.

Hutterite birth rates remain high, though they have dropped from around ten children per family in 1954 to under five today, so that a colony's population may still double in a generation, prompting the periodic establishment of new colonies, since "colonies rarely get larger than 150 to 160 people."

While several beginning chapters in this study cover Hutterite history, the later chapters describe the life and faith of the about 500 colonies. . . .

"Most modern Hutterites are the direct descendents of about 90 individuals," say the authors, the result of endogamy and few converts for hundreds of years. That explains why 99 percent of Hutterites carry one of only 14 names, chief among them Entz, Glanzer, Gross, Hofer, Kleinsasser, Mendel, Stahl, Tschetter, Waldner, Wipf, and Wollman. Despite this endogamy the Hutterites gene pool remains surprisingly healthy.

In the second two thirds of their book Janzen and Stanton describe Hutterite beliefs, practices, traditions, and institutions. Even as they are remarkably open to technology, colonies remain tradition-bound in worship practices, sticking to a rereading of old sermons from a fixed canon of sermons from several centuries ago. Schmiedeleut One is the main group venturing to break out of this tradition. Colonies have their own schools on colony premises, through which Hutterites become bilingual, although their own dialect, derived from the Tirol, remains their everyday language.

The great majority of colonies stay engaged in agriculture, although a few have ventured into manufacturing. Their efficiency and mass production make them major players in the agricultural economies of the states and provinces where they live. The relatively few colonies of Montana, for example, produce over 90 percent of that state's hogs and 98 per-

cent of its eggs. Non-Hutterite farmers cannot compete with Hutterite efficiency.

While technology may bring Hutterites economic success, its most recent developments also raise problems. Colonies have long used computers to manage machines and to keep track of budgets and agricultural production. But computers have opened the door to the Internet, exposing young people to worldly influences, even immoral ones.

This, our authors suggest, has encouraged defections. Hutterites have a word for defectors, *Weggeluffene*, literally runaways, young people who leave the colony for individual freedom. Some return, make confession, and get reintegrated into colony life. A surprising 15 percent leave permanently, more of them young men than young women, creating the problem of whom the young women left on the colonies can marry.

Hutterites have their critics. Many evangelicals, including Mennonites, question whether many of them are genuine Christians or only committed to a traditional culture. Our authors admit that for some of them religion is a formality. Yet all Hutterites go to prayers every evening before supper, colony elders exercise church discipline, and colony members exhibit strong family life.

Given their distinctive dress, language, and colony life, Hutterites remain conscious of their difference from outsiders. At the same time most colonies have non-Hutterite teachers for their “English” school. They are

hospitable to visitors and relate comfortably to outsiders with whom they do business, or neighbors with whom they share common concerns.

They are imperfect and seek to cope with the same problems the rest of us do. But they adhere tenaciously to their heritage—the rejection of military service, for example. Janzen and Stanton note that there has not been one murder among them in the nearly 500 years of Hutterite history. Moreover, they are the only known group that has continued to successfully practice community of goods for these nearly 500 years.

The fruit of many years of conscientious research, this book is a veritable mine of information about all aspects of Hutterite life. It is therefore rewarding reading for anyone interested in these people.

Numbering nearly 50,000 today, Hutterites have just passed their previous population peak during what Leonard Gross called their “Golden Years” in 1565–1578, following which persecution decimated their number. Our authors ask whether they now face a new golden age. Some Hutterite leaders are seeking to become more missionary. Notwithstanding the challenges of life in the twenty-first century, Janzen and Stanton remain confident that Hutterites will thrive and be around for the foreseeable future.

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

Words, Revisited

Noël R. King

I did not realize how many words were scattered around the house, unkempt and so long forgotten.

As I was sweeping under my bed, for instance, I came across a dilapidated rendering of “supercalifragilisticexpialidocious” in a pile of gray dust under the far corner.

“Oh my goodness!” I said. “Let’s get you out of there and dusted off!”

It jangled and creaked as I hooked it with my broom and dragged it across the floor and out from under the bed.

I took it to the bathtub and gave it a good soaking, after first asking it if it were indeed waterproof. It assured me that it was and that a good bath was what it wished for most, before eating a plate of fish and chips.

“Fish and chips?” I asked. “Really? You eat that kind of stuff?”

Certainly, it told me, and dove back under the bath water.

After that, I saw neglected and wounded words wherever I went in my house. Oh, it was terrible! I could not believe I had never before noticed the carnage. Unused words had been piling up in the corners for years, it soon became apparent, and I had been oblivious the whole time.

Many of them had fallen out of books that I had never finished, I discovered, and there was an entire pile under the kitchen table from where I had ceaselessly interrupted my friends while conversing on the telephone. Many of those words were horribly mangled, chopped in half, torn, stepped on, smushed. Oh, it was awful—I could barely speak when I realized the extent of my betrayal to the English language.

I found words stuffed between and under the couch cushions, many missing vowels and the dots to go over their i's. I found a bunch of those dots piled in a corner, entangled in spider's webs and scuffed around the edges. Out on the porch I saw a bird's nest composed largely of the crossbars that make up f's and t's.

"I am SO SORRY!" I cried to all of them while standing in the middle of the living room, a useless "a" dangling from my hand (it had gotten caught in the ceiling fan and was worn and white from all those countless revolutions).

I heard some halfhearted replies, groans, and whimpers from around the house. A few baby words came crawling over to hang onto my feet and play with my bare toes.

I bent down to pick them up. "You are so adorable!" I laughed through

my tears. "I cannot bear how cute you are!"

They tittered and giggled, changing shapes and colors as they did.

I set them down and walked over to where I saw a large grouping of dried-out words draped over the top of the large painting of The Last Supper that was hanging on my living room wall.

"What's going on over here?" I asked them as I drew next to the painting. "Why did you end up here?"

"Picture's worth a thousand words," gasped one of the longest words. "Hear it all the time. Kills us! So much less . . . less . . . *Why?*?"

His words ended in a wail, and he began weeping, the tears rolling down over the painting, right over Jesus' face.

"Oh, honey," I said. "They never meant that you were worth any less than a painting! The truth is that a picture is worth a thousand words because there are millions and millions of words that make up every painting. That's what color and paint are made of, didn't you know?"

The tears slowly stopped as I continued to stand there, and I heard a creaking and crackling as more and more of the other words atop the painting tried to sit up or move.

"Is that true? Is she right? Can it be? Can we trust her?" I heard many rustlings and whisperings back and forth, and I saw that several seemed to be gaining some lifeblood back. Flashes of color started appearing as

more and more of them fleshed out and flew or jumped or crawled down the wall off the painting's edge.

"We can be a painting ourselves!" I heard one particularly bright phrase exclaim as they went by. "We've done a bunch of sentences; don't you think we can do a picture?"

"We can! We can!" was the reverberating response as they climbed up the coffee table and began discussing their newfound vision.

Finally, in the far corner of my bedroom, I saw a very fat pile of unexpressed words, who had apparently tried to escape out the bay window over the years. Many of them, I saw, had gotten stuck between the inside window and outside screen as they had tried uselessly to squeeze themselves through and on to some kind of life—somewhere, anywhere.

"Who are you all?" I asked the group, because it felt like the right thing to do.

You have never heard such a clamoring, such a feverish pitch of expression, such a commotion and loudness of noise, the second I asked.

It was a cacophony, and I saw that word in the middle of the pile, breakdancing amid all the singing, shouting, laughing, and crying of the other words.

"I am SO ANGRY!" I heard. "I'm hungry—LOVE y—want to—wish I cou—FEEL—think that—HA HA HA!—it shoul—HURT—can't believe yo—why don't—whatever made you—SORRY—I am—tir—where it—OH! OH!"

"Okay, okay," I said. "I get it. You are dying to express yourselves. Go ahead, go ahead, but I am going to leave for a while and shut the door behind me until you've gotten all of this out of your systems."

I literally had to put my hands over my ears before I reached the door, or my hearing might have been damaged permanently. My ears were ringing as it was.

"Good Lord!" I said to myself as I went back to the bathtub and fished out Super.

"You good to go here?" I asked.

"Oh, you bet" cried Super. "I feel SO SUPERCALIFRAGILISTIC-EXPIALIDOCIOUS!"

"Back to your old self, I see," I said. "Marvelous!"

"Yes!" Super cried again. "She's a WONDERFUL friend of mine! Is she here, too?"

"Probably," I said. "I'll send her up if I find her."

"I'm so happy!" Super laughed, as he finished drying himself off and

It was a cacophony, and I saw that word in the middle of the pile, breakdancing amid all the singing, shouting, laughing, and crying of the other words.

went clinking down the hallway—he had so many joints to maneuver throughout his body.

"Me too,"

I said to the air in general, as I sat down on my couch

to write in my journal. Then I lightly called to all four corners of my house:

“Come join me now, all who wish to help me tell the story of this day and how I rediscovered all of you.”

As I had guessed would happen, I was mobbed right and left with words, phrases, and even completely formed sentences. I thought I might have seen an actual paragraph in there, too, but I was probably just fooling myself.

—As circumstances warrant, through her Turquoise Pen column Noël R. King, Scottsville, Virginia, reports on strange and wonderful or worrisome things, including ignored words dying to express themselves.



When the Call Comes

When the call comes
you will hear yourself say
what people say at such times:
 “her suffering is over now”
 “he always said he wanted to go with his boots on”
 “she lived a good life”
and part of you,
most of you,
believes it.

But the rest of you
wants to carry
protest signs
around God’s headquarters
and chant slogans
of indignation
and rage.

—Ken Gible

Authenticity, Transformed Shadows, and Betty D. King

Michael A. King

I've arrived at that stage each generation finally reaches of beginning to lose the preceding generation. Increasingly I attend funerals of my friends' loved ones. Last time the service was for my own mother. After several funerals of my friends' loved ones I learned how traumatized my friends had been by the gap between the glowing eulogies and the real-life shadows of the departed ones. This has me wrestling again with a reality that has troubled me since boyhood: The way we talk about the Christian walk is often fiction.

Maybe my family and I are just messier than the norm. Maybe everyone else is bewilderedly whispering, "Say what?" to my strange take on public affirmations of how wonderfully the Lord guides and blesses. Maybe your family doesn't have hidden shadows. I do suspect there are those for whom the rift is narrower, and I don't want to minimize or undercut for them their blessings.

But when my mother died I felt again the importance of this issue. How would we celebrate my mom without crafting a fantasy instead of telling the truth about her?

My mother was in her way a giant. She gave me many of my life's resources and gifts. I can't imagine having become writer, pastor, dean, ever fascinated with God, theology, and the meaning of life had it not been for the endless hours I spent as a teenager hanging over the counter while she cooked.

I was always full of questions about everything, including whether there was really a God and whether the Bible was really true. So on and on I'd go, pushing my skeptic's agenda while she defended (often amazingly well) the faith. And sometimes hinted that she found my questions a tad intriguing herself. To her final days, when introducing me to people she'd report one of her favorite things about us: We were really good arguers! When she was dying I told her I couldn't have been a dean without her sharpening my mind. She couldn't talk any more. But she smiled.

In her final months, precisely the wild spirit that made her a wonderful intellectual sparring partner turned things difficult for her and many, including the staff at her retirement community. Parkinson's stole her peace of mind and mobility. After she died I looked for ways to thank staff for hanging in—and was blessed by Valda Weider Garber, head nurse

overseeing the staff. She phoned to offer words of healing. She told me those final weeks had reminded her of "Better than a Hallelujah?" a song by Sara Hart and Chapin Hartford recently made popular by Amy Grant's cover. Particularly she was reminded of the line, "Beautiful the mess we are." The line went straight into my bruised heart. When I emailed Valda to thank her, she sent me back this paragraph:

I sang that song in church. . . . Faces were somber, some relieved. I mentioned before singing the song that we, as Brethren by denomination and Christian by belief, have long suffered in silence when life happens, not wanting to question God's almighty will or ability to know what is best for us. Questioning "why" somehow is equated with non-belief, or at minimum, questioning the will of God. However, in my own life experience, I have learned that God wants me to question, to cry, to ask why, and through that process, receive his grace and ultimately his blessing. The Bible is full of individuals who were messes (David, Saul who became Paul, the woman at the well); individuals whom God used despite their messy lives. We are all messes in some way. We fail miserably. But God still sees us as beautiful.

How would we celebrate my mom without crafting a fantasy instead of telling the truth about her?

Amid that interchange, I was getting ready to give a committee meeting devotional and a summary of my vision as new dean of Eastern Mennonite Seminary. One thing I'd been doing as dean was developing areas of emphasis for me to keep in view while leading EMS. It hit me that there was an area I hadn't thought to add to my EMS themes but have long been passionate about; I've called it "transforming the shadows" and describe it as—

fostering through the content of studies, and the spirit within which seminary life unfolds, a fierce love for the church that is able to celebrate that the church is the real body of Christ and also is ever shadowed by failures and fallibilities; shadows named rather than suppressed can become, through the saving grace of God in Christ, sources of transformation grounded in authenticity rather than unacknowledged subversion of stated values and commitments (Luke 7:36-50).

When at the end of the week we

held the memorial service for my mother, this guided my thinking about what to say in my tribute to her. And though I hadn't shared it with other family members, they too seemed to be operating from their version of it. Together we found ways to tell the truth about my mom, about how her wild self could be both a challenge and a wonder, about how she helped us grasp that though none of us are saints, through the grace of God in Christ the messes we are can be made beautiful.

So I dedicate my "transforming the shadows" theme to my mother, Betty Detweiler King, who helped me both to see the shadows and to trust that God can transform them into gifts of beauty.

—*Michael A. King, Telford, Pennsylvania, and Harrisonburg, Virginia, is Dean, Eastern Mennonite Seminary; and publisher, Cascadia Publishing House LLC. This column first appeared on the Eastern Mennonite Seminary blog at <http://emu.edu/blog/work-and-hope/2010/10/21/authenticity-transformed-shadows-and-betty-d-king/>*



Callie

Meek was how I would have described her if anybody had asked. No one had or was likely to.

Others, like me, thought she needed protecting which was why one of them had told me the man she was seeing

was bad news. "I think you need to step in, pastor." So I did, called him in, told him what I had

heard, said I'd like to hear his side of the story. The next day she phoned, said we needed to talk.

She came to my study. She got, as they say, in my face. "Do you think I can't decide for myself who

to marry? Who put you in charge of my life?" That was for openers. Meek, I decided, was a word best applied to someone

else.



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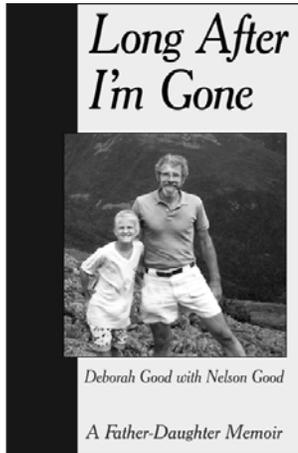
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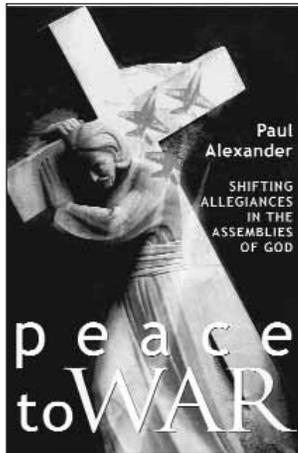
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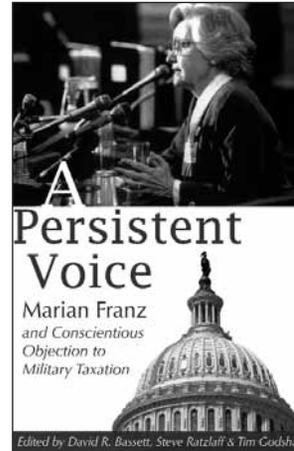
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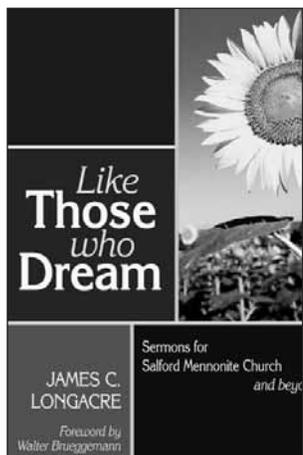
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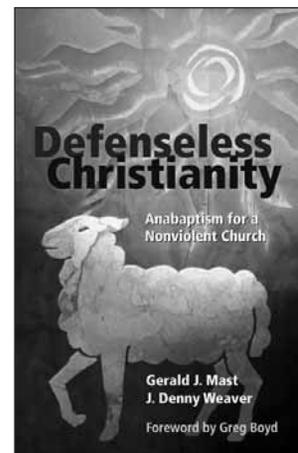


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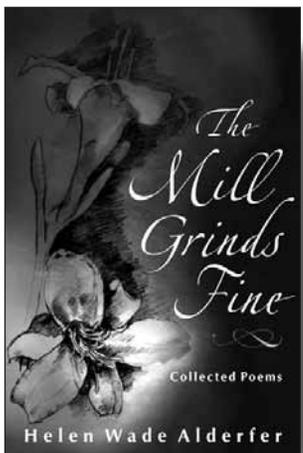
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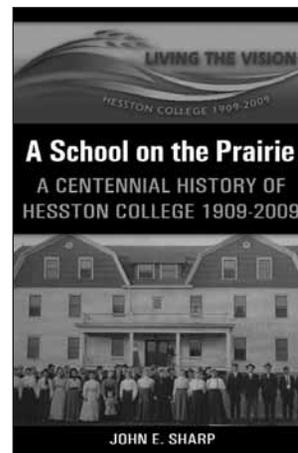


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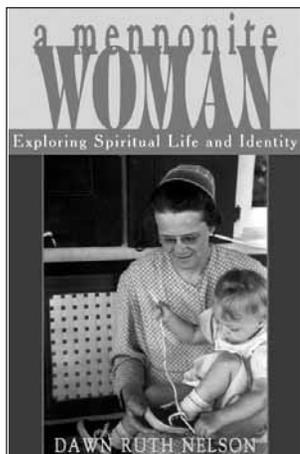
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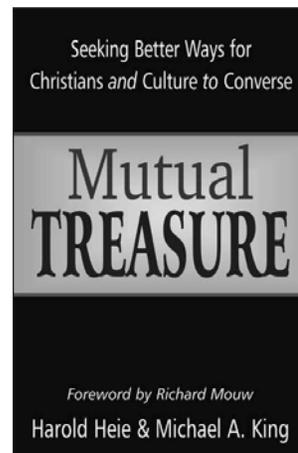


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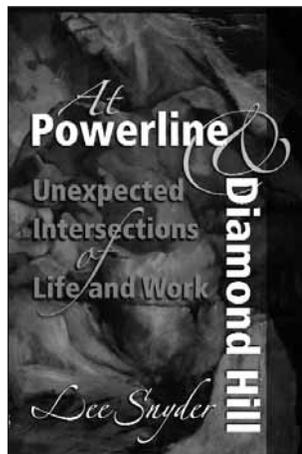


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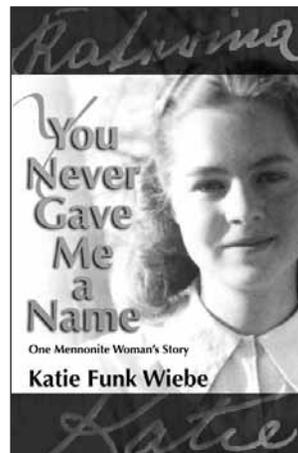


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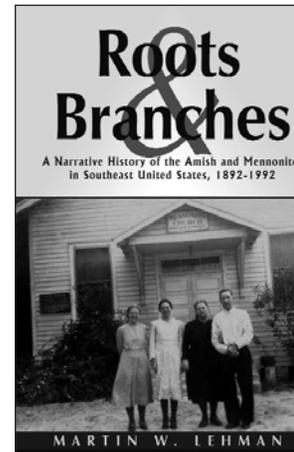
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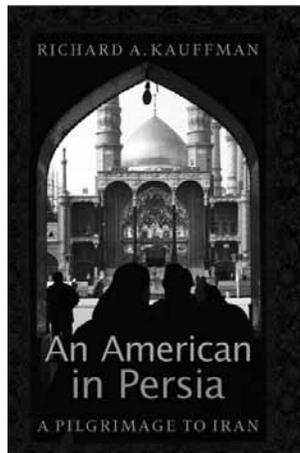


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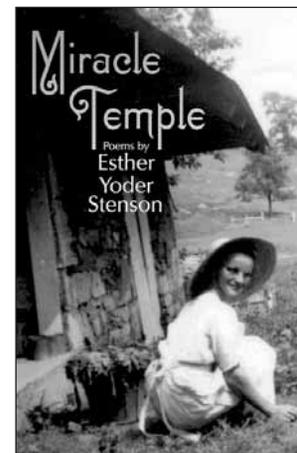


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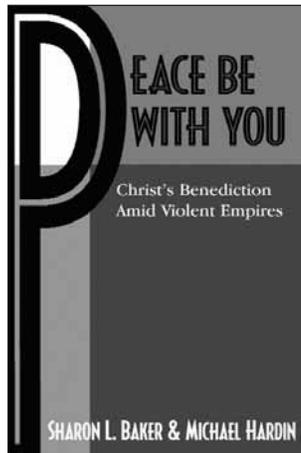
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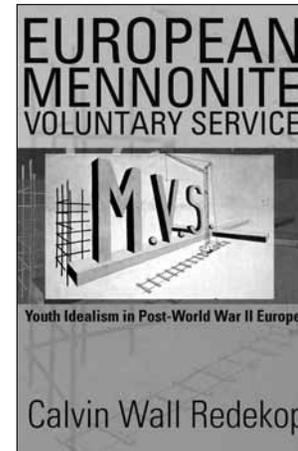
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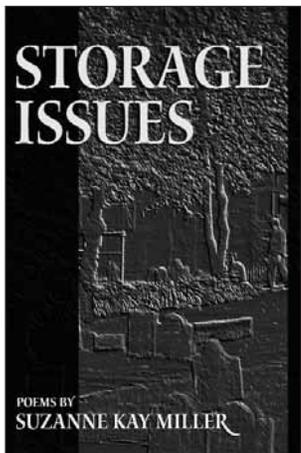
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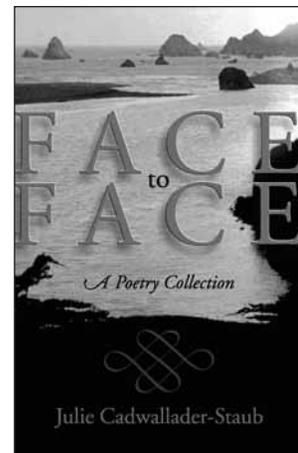
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I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a banana cream pie.

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood
and I took the one to the left.

To be or not to be?
That is a question requiring careful deliberation. I suggest an
ad hoc committee be appointed and that it report its
finding at our next meeting.

I wandered lonely as a hobo.

Listen, my children, and you shall hear
Of the midnight ride I took last year . . .
Or was it the year before that?

A thing of beauty Is a joy.
That's for sure.

Little Boy Blue, come blow your horn,
Or clap your hands.
Or whatever.

Mares eat oats
and doe eat oats
and little lambs eat grass.

Amazing grace, it sure sounds sweet.
In fact, you know, it can't be beat.

—*Ken Gibble*