DreamSeeker Magazine

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Spring 2008
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Editorial: Let Spring Burst Out!

The word has recently been circulating that Westerners are less and less connected to nature. Instead we relate to the world through electronic media. What a tragedy.

Yet all is not lost. Spring is here, a season during which even obsessed technophiles may manage a peek at nature's beauties. And I challenge any reader to take in the first three articles in this issue and not feel blessed by springtime images of lambing, jars of strawberry love, and digging (even peeing!) in a garden's dirt.

Maybe all or most of these writings connect to spring if we think of it as a season of primal forces, life bursting forth, energies seeking to bear fruit.

I don't want to impose a spring theme too rigidly on the rest of the materials in this issue of *DreamSeeker Magazine.* But maybe all or most of these writings connect to spring if we think of it as a season of primal forces, life bursting forth, energies seeking to bear fruit.

Kent Davis Sensenig reminds us of that primal force which was the Beatles. Love or hate them in their springtime, how they did blossom! Even as Regina Wenger's story is set in summer (and in time for Father's Day), its report on a budding relationship with her dad feels springlike.

The tone shifts with Deborah Good and David Greiser—now we're pondering the beauties and risks of sex and how they connect with sex education or unplanned pregnancy. But if dangers and appropriate channels for sexual expression need to be mentored into us, what a springlike drive sex at its best is.

And might it just possibly be the impish urge of spring blooming in her spirit that prompts Noël R. King to tell us so casually of the encounter with the little face in the UFO?

Then anger, as in Mark Wenger's column. Is anger springlike? I'm reminded of the spring I drove through the Rockies on Interstate 70, stopped at a rest area, and found I couldn't call my parents on my cell phone because the spring snow melts had made the Colorado River roar too loud. What do we do with a force like that? Wenger asks.

Meanwhile Renee Gehman draws spiritual lessons from a child in springtime. And this issue's poets touch spring in seeking to touch the very heartbeat of life. Maybe even Daniel Hertzler, writing about peace and security, connects with spring. Because how often are the crops of spring trampled when war and violence rage over them.

So let spring burst out!

—Michael A. King

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In this issue

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Dear Editors:

I continue to enjoy *DreamSeeker Magazine* and read the most recent issue (Winter 2008) in one sitting.

Different customs associated with baptism are particularly intriguing to me. I think Quakers do not baptize or for that matter observe any of the other practices which we Mennonites call ordinances.

My thought about adult baptism and the severe persecution it elicited in olden days is that it was really an expression of Christians' desire to be free from the rule of the state. Thus in our day, the tendency to mix what we call patriotism and religion is the real issue—not whether we baptize in infancy or adulthood.

—Dorothy Cutrell, Deland, Florida

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

The Heart of It

—After Marcus Borg

*Fiducia**

They zipped up their jackets
and flew out the door into
winter fog and traffic.
What rooted me then,
kept me from running after?
No assurance except
the necessity to allow
breath and space, and
the memory of a flax field
in childhood, how once I
lay down it its blue blooming
and felt the sky encircle me.

*Fidelitas**

The tree is upside-down,
she said. Roots must be
pulled out and thrust
upward where they tremble,
drying. Birds settle there,
sing of release and of
earth's fragrance.
A tree cannot live in such
reversal unless it drinks
song and sky.

*Vision**

The Lover is both earth
and air as we stand
in silent embrace.
What language shall I borrow
to speak this doubleness
of clinging and letting go?

In a dream there are no
words, only the warmth
of cheek against cheek,
full recognition, and calm.

**fiducia:* radical trust; *fidelitas:* no other gods; *visio:* seeing it whole

—*Jean Janzen, Fresno, California, is an award-winning poet. This poem is from her forthcoming collection of poetry,* Paper House.

Lambing

David Corbin

Lambing season is an amazing time of year. It may be helped by the fact that, for us at least, it comes in the early spring. While lambing arrives along with crocus and tulips and other signs that the cold and grey of our winters is about over, lambing is too full of wonder to be treated like spring's icing.

You can tell when a ewe is ready to start lambing by the way she acts. To begin, she moves off to separate herself from the other sheep. When this occurs, the other sheep respect the distance. Even with sheep that have a high flocking instinct (like ours do), this is a time when you get a little extra space.

During the rest of the year, a ewe prefers to be in the middle of the flock and always works to keep a good distance between herself and my wife and me. Now, however, she's open to a little pressure and can be moved into a barn stall or "lambing jug" even though there aren't any other sheep around.

When contractions start, the ewe will lie down, stand, turn around, sit down again, stand again, and continue to look for a comfortable position until the first lamb starts to show. At this point, the ewe is usually standing. She's also oblivious to her surroundings.

She's working very hard, particularly if she's never lambed before. Teeth clenched, breathing heavily, and

staring right at me, she doesn't know I'm there. When the first lamb "drops," the fall breaks the umbilical cord. It lies on the ground covered with mucus and not breathing. The ewe turns around quickly and starts licking it.

This has several effects. The lamb starts breathing and attempts to get up. Its mother is now nudging it and encouraging it to stand. If there is to be a twin (and with our breed there usually is), the second lamb arrives about now. When it drops, the ewe turns quickly back around to begin licking this lamb and starting its life.

Meanwhile, the first lamb is now standing and, low and behold, right in front of its face there is a nipple dripping with colostrum and all ready for it. When the second lamb is cleaned up, the ewe turns back to the first lamb and, in the process, presents the second lamb with its first meal.

Anyway, 007 was having her lambs for the ninth time and didn't need any help, so I went to bed.

This process never loses its wonder for me. The intricacy of this sequence of events is a joy to behold. However, it doesn't always work right. Last year, one of our oldest ewes began lambing late one evening. She's a small ewe and was 11 years old at the time. That's pretty old for a working ewe. She'd long since lost her teeth, qualifying her for the old ladies' "gummer" club. Since it's harder to get enough nourishment in a pasture when you don't have teeth, sheep are generally culled at that point.

But this was "007," our lead ewe. I don't need a sheep dog. When I want to move the flock, I can point to the gate I want them to move through, and 007 will lead them through. It's not that she particularly likes me. It's just that she knows that I don't move them whimsically and that when I point them in a new direction, it's usually because there's something better to eat on the other side.

Anyway, 007 was having her lambs for the ninth time and didn't need any help, so I went to bed. In the morning, I came out to discover that she was not done. The first lamb had evidently been born breach and had taken a great deal of effort. The lamb had been cleaned and was lying down but probably hadn't had any nourishment yet. 007 was lying beside her lamb completely exhausted. She couldn't even lift her head.

The front hooves of her second lamb were just protruding but 007 didn't have the strength to push the lamb out. I pulled this little lamb out and lay it on some hay. Then I picked up 007 and lay her back down with her head resting on the new sticky lamb. That was all she needed. While I got the first lamb nursing, 007 started licking the second lamb on which her head rested. When it started kicking, I moved it back to start it nursing too. Then I gave 007 some electrolyte to give her some energy and left them alone for a while.

When I returned about an hour later, all three were standing in the lambing jug. They were ready for the next exciting moment life would offer.

This evening when I went out to feed the flock, there was 007 standing at the gate, wondering why I was taking so long. Right behind her was her second lamb, now almost a year old. We didn't breed 007 again, so she's going to be very peeved in several weeks when everybody else starts dropping their lambs and she has none. But her last little lamb is sticking with her now and will be ready to breed in the fall with the other yearlings we've kept.

There are hundreds of examples of the wonder of God's creation. But for me, lambing is right up close to the top.

—David W. Corbin and his wife live on an island off the Washington coast. There they raise sheep, work at the post office, run a preschool, and sell homemade jams.

Communion Box

In a box lined with mirrors
are rows and rows of glass cups
filled with red wine. Open
the lid to see the generations

of rims, to inhale the sweet
ferment. Then reach in.
Look, your hand is everywhere,
lifting one cup, no,

a hundred, or thousand
in every direction. Drink now
with all the others who
this day lift life to their lips.

Then go, holding within you
the crush, hallways of mirrors,
and the wooden box,
its slices of tree and its nails,

all of it covered with
the skin of a lamb, still open
and shivering where you
entered with your hand.

—Jean Janzen. This poem is from her forthcoming collection, Paper House.

Strawberry Love

Brenda Hartman-Souder

The two parallel plots at the west end of our large yard in rural Ohio were at least 25 feet long and several plants wide. In May, my father carefully spread straw around and under the greenery emerging from winter's sleep. He taught my sisters and me to water properly, around the circumference of each spreading plant, to avoid injuring or shocking the white blossoms, the promise of budding fruit.

The Californian variety hits the Syracuse, New York supermarkets in May, perfectly packed into clear "clamshell" containers. I impulsively buy and deliberately hoard them, swooshing away my kids when they circle round like vultures asking for "just one." Because after I've carved off the pale, stiff, unripe tops and dole out just one, there are barely enough left to make a ruby splash in each dessert dish.

They always disappoint, tasting of plastic and refrigerator. They are never sweet or juicy enough, as if they were bred to lure hapless shoppers into buying but had no intention of satisfying.

In early June they began to ripen, thousands and thousands ready to pick every several days. Summer vacation had just started, and I longed to sleep in, go

swimming with friends, read books. I longed to do anything except rise early and pick quart after quart on hands and knees.

This is what I remember: three grumbling daughters and a determined mother, picking as furiously and meticulously as possible. The sun, rising relentlessly over two maple trees, baked our backs, burning through thin cotton blouses. Sweat dripped and mingled with the dewy freshness of perfectly ripe berries.

This is what I remember: three grumbling daughters and a determined mother, picking as furiously and meticulously as possible.

We ate all we wanted as we picked; it barely made a dent in this profusion of fertility, until finally, we had worked our way up the rows. My mother, after inspecting the plants to make sure we hadn't left any ripe fruit behind, declared our picking finished for that morning. The berries, in pale wooden quart boxes were loaded onto cookie sheet trays and marched to the house.

By mid-June our central New York farmer's market bursts with local berry vendors. They resemble the strawberries of my youth, crimson and shiny in their plump ripeness. The farmer assures me the berries were picked "just this morning."

I cart home several quarts and often discover that underneath the perfect fruits on top, lay some less than perfect cousins. I know there is no way these berries could have been picked less than six hours ago. There are luscious, sweet fruits, to be sure—but among them are also ones which have already turned a darker shade of claret and are spongy to touch. The hint of mold and rancid taste of too sweet, rotting fruit threatens to spoil the whole batch. But I keep buying because I love them, my kids love them, and what is summer without strawberries?

Neighbors, relatives, and church friends started to arrive at our home on Baumgartner Road, just west of Kidron, Ohio, within hours of our morning labor to buy and haul away quart after quart. Advertisement was by word of mouth, and no berry of my mother's was ever intentionally driven down our gravel driveway if not perfectly ripe, perfectly firm, and perfectly plump. Soon our 35 quarts of picking would be reduced to a pile of quarters and $1 bills. The money earned on our one-crop farm during strawberry season was swallowed by the never ending needs of a growing family—shoes, eyeglasses, the oil bill.

The seconds, those berries too small to honorably sell, were ours to eat; several boxes of them perpetually filled the shelves of my mother's spotless refrigerator. Homemade pie, shortcake, and sliced strawberries on ice cream completed our early summer meals night after June night.

A couple on a neighboring street planted a small raised bed of strawberries last year. We never learned their names. They don't seem interested in

saying hi, waving, or even smiling at us when our family strolls around the block each night after supper.

This summer the plants are putting forth berries in decidedly generous portions for a city garden under the partial shade of a maple. My seven-year-old daughter Val spots them and asks if we can pluck "just one." She knows better. Impulsively I launch into my teachable moment lesson about stealing, but secretly I'm with HER—I long to reach in and pull these heart-shaped globes draped over the wooden slats, plop them in my mouth, and feel their seedy texture disintegrate to succulent juice.

Love was jam bursting over hot buttered toast in winter.

My mother cooked jar after jar of strawberry jam—equal parts sugar and fruit mashed together to simmer on the 1970s avocado-hued Hotpoint stove. My sisters and I were the preparation and clean-up crew but not allowed near the boiling garnet liquid. We were never permitted to stir it or skim off the white bubbling mass rising to the top.

My mother watched her strawberries like a jealous lover. Then, at the moment she deemed perfect, she'd pour the quivering hot mass into sterilized jars, screw the lids on, and wipe down each pint.

The ping of lids sealing marked the next several hours. The sign of a good woman: how many of those lids sealed. What efficiency, what cleanliness, what precision my mother displayed! Only 100 percent was good enough. She usually achieved it.

From strawberry season into fall, our kitchen burst with produce from the garden and neighboring orchards, my mother methodically processing a parade of peaches, pears, beets, beans, tomatoes, corn, and apples. Work came first; play second. Complaining was ignored.

We rented because my parents couldn't afford to buy. We drove used cars, wore hand-me-down clothing, took obsessive care of our possessions. Vacations were limited and luxuries few. My father often chastised me about those long, wasteful showers I took as a teenager.

Economy of endearing words and physical affection were practiced as well, but we ate lavishly—love served on our plates and urged down our throats. We ate meat, potatoes, garden vegetables, every imaginable dessert. There was always more food than we could ever need.

Love was food on the table, straight and weeded rows of vegetables, perfectly folded sheets, tightly budgeted piano lessons and the without-fail attendance at both church and softball games. Love was embedded in our careful plans and routines. Love was jam bursting over hot buttered toast in winter.

I've found the right spot in the back of our double city lot, just in front of the old raspberry bushes that line the back boundary. It's flat and sunny, there by the sandbox scattered with buckets, spades, and plastic dump trucks, and in no competition for the running space required of a good Wiffleball game. I see them, two dozen plants or so, pushing spiky green foliage across gently laid Sunday-newspaper bedding.

I see myself sneaking out there in June, kneeling down and eating and eating and eating, juice dripping down my chin, blood on my fingers, and grateful. I see deep-red jars of love lining my kitchen counter.

—Brenda Hartman-Souder, Jos, Nigeria, serves as co-representative of MCC Nigeria and as parent of Valerie and Greg, along with spouse Mark. She notes that strawberries available in Nigeria never make the "homegrown in Ohio" grade, but the mangoes are exceptional.

I Think of Ohio

I think of Ohio, and the trains at night,
So long ago.
The long, dark, hollow call
Of other times.
The murmur of strangers carried
Onward in the dark,
Like me,
Into the nowhere of a dream.
My mind turns back. Was it really
Simpler, then?
The strangeness of that mournful cry, remembered,
Is like a sigh, the letting go
Of worlds,
An exhalation of the soul.
Oh, will I
Hear that traveler again
Before the dagger of the day?

—Alan Soffin, Doylestown, Pennsylvania, whose interests are philosophy, religion, filmmaking, writing, classical, jazz, rock, and international music. This poem is among the sudden memories of an elderly person before whom float the faces of people too wonderful to have gone. Ohio has to do with several of them.

In the Garden

Anna Maria Johnson

I am far from an expert gardener. I am, in all honesty, a fairly lousy gardener. But I do spend a great deal of time working at it. I am an idealistic gardener. If my garden fails to measure up to the orderly, thriving, weed-free, well-mulched cornucopia of abundance in my head, there is a good lesson in that somewhere.

These are my five reasons for gardening.

I garden because it is my favorite form of peaceful protest. It is my response to all that is ugly in the world, all that is cheap and easy and manufactured and gas-guzzling, all that comes wrapped up in a box after being shipped 5,000 miles across the planet, and all that causes cancer and social injustice and oppression.

I am powerless to end these bad things on a global scale, or even on a local scale. But when I set my shovel down on my small plot of earth, I declare, "In God's name, not here." I claim these few square feet of my back yard for the kingdom of God. "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." I smell this earth, I allow it to collect under my nails, discoloring my hands. It is my prayer for the will of God to be done, right here under my nails. Thy will be done on earth, in the earth, through the earth.

I garden because it keeps me hoping. My mom used to call me a "hopeless romantic," and my husband might describe me as exorbitantly idealistic. I cannot deny that it is a function of my personality, and some people would say it is a beautiful thing to be this way. It can also be very disappointing when reality doesn't match up to my expectations.

Gardening, however, delivers on its promises. Last summer our white-seeded Tarahumara sunflowers reached mythological heights. During the autumn we feasted on butternut squashes and late-harvested vegetables, and in winter my 15 quarts of salsa nourished us and warmed our tongues.

Gardening, however, delivers on its promises.

I garden because it keeps me grounded—literally and spiritually. There is nothing like good, hard, physical work with our hands to bring comfort in times of disappointment. I have found that when I am angry, it can be used as a force for good. My anger gives my measly 102-pound frame an extra punch as I throw my weight upon my shovel and churn up the dirt.

Digging is hard. But after a good couple of hours with my shovel, now dirty, sweat-soaked, and stinky, I feel cleansed. Catharsis. Afterward, I ache with a good kind of ache.

The Genesis story is powerful in the way it reveals human beings and our connection to the earth, to gardening. Adam and Eve were given a beautiful home in a garden, and we are told that they walked there with God in the cool of the evening. In a garden, remnants still linger of that human-divine relationship, of right relationship, of care-taking.

During a severe time of wilderness in my life, some friends and I were not attending regular church. We met sometimes on Sunday mornings to cultivate a shared garden. We called it "the garden church." There was something profound about those work celebrations, those active prayers, those times of productive gathering of the community of believers.

The three-year-old son of our friends would run up and down the raised beds, naked, laughing. One time he peed in the garden and proudly proclaimed to his dad, "Look! I am watering the garden." I suppose there are all manner of spiritual parallels to this boy's action, but I will leave that to you, dear reader, to mull over. The Garden Church was a spiritual place, a place of community and of communion with the created and the Creator.

I garden because this is good in itself. I grow weary of feeling guilty about things, tired of saying no—but organic gardening is not simply a negative action of not buying pesticides, not purchasing plastic-wrapped produce, not supporting agri-business and factory farming. Rather, it is a positive act. To grow a garden is to marvel at creation.

I drop tiny, brown, wrinkled things in the ground. Every time, I feel surprised when something eventually sprouts up. I get so excited that I call my children and point to the tiny little dicot leaves, "Look! our food is growing." And we stoop down to admire its tiny new life, its persistence at

pushing up through the brown earth, its stamina, its goodness.

My friend Molly, who lived in Afghanistan for many years and now lives in Jerusalem, once told me she valued my flower garden. I was humbled because I had felt that I was unable to make an impact for good on earth, instead spending all my time at home caring for babies and flowers while she was translating Farsi for the UN and working for peace. She told me that my roses and lilies were doing as much good as the work she was doing on the other side of the earth. I chose to believe her.

Most important, I garden for love of the earth and those it nourishes. I love the act of gardening. I enjoy digging. I like the smell of rich, dark dirt. I get a kick out of compost; nothing is wasted—it just gets re-allocated, renewed, regenerated. No death is so great that it cannot serve yet another life, another body. I am forgiven for letting those vegetables sit in the fridge too long until they rotted.

Compost is the perfect object lesson for God's words, "Behold, I make all things new," and a good illustration of the concept that all things work together for the good of those who love God. Worms, dirt, detritus—they all work together to make yummy veggies and beautiful flowers. Resurrection.

Gardening makes me strong, makes me healthy, makes me whole, and it is a relationship of reciprocity: I feed the garden and the garden feeds me. The food that the garden gives to me is physical, tangible, tasty, but it is also spiritual. Gardening helps me to love God, who becomes less abstract and more the Vibrant, Surprising, Creating, Sustaining force I really do believe in.

The fruits of the garden nourish my family, our house guests, our neighbors, our friends. The eating together of home-grown produce is love in tangible form.

In closing, I borrow from "Beauty in the Garden," a chapter in *The Fragrance of God* (Eerdmans, 2006), by Orthodox priest Vigen Guroian.

> In my garden, I take hope from Jesus' promise to the repentant thief on the cross that he will be with his Lord in Paradise. I know that the sweat and tears of penance bring Paradise near in my backyard. For a garden is a profound sign and deep symbol of salvation, like none other, precisely because a garden was our first habitation, and God has deemed it to be our final home. Beauty is the aim of life. God imagined it so. God spoke the Word, and his invisible Image of Beauty became a visible garden. . . . (84-85)

—Anna Maria Johnson makes her home in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley with her photographer-husband and their two young daughters. Her main pursuits include writing, making visual art, and cultivating beauty in the forms of food, flowers, and relationships. She places special emphasis on observing the light falling through her kitchen windows.

The Beatles Meet High School Musical!

Kent Davis Sensenig

The highest compliment I can give *Across the Universe* (a movie musical/narrative interpretation of the music of the Beatles) is that John Lennon would have loved it! Why do I think so? Because the movie's makers use mass media (pop music and film) to speak to a mass audience (of teens and twenty-somethings) about the spirit of their age (*zeitgeist*) in an artsy, subversive, and bohemian way. This is exactly what the Beatles were doing in their day.

The Beatles targeted their peers (and younger) via rock singles and albums, yes, but also movies like "A Hard Day's Night" and "Help!"; animation like "Yellow Submarine"; rockumentaries like "Let it Be"; and TV events like the Ed Sullivan Show, the "Magical Mystery Tour" special, and the live world-premiere of their sing-a-long single "All You Need is Love" (prefiguring MTV by a generation).

Tapping the newly potent post-war mass media, they reached a global audience. And they used this platform to publicly experiment with new forms of music, spirituality, community, politics, and fashion

(actually, the fashion came first), and, of course, mind-blowing drugs . . . as good bohemians have always done (remember Baudelaire?)

The main criticism I might make of the movie is that it recycles (in post-modern/pastiche style) all the same old tropes, myths, and larger-than-life pop culture events/personalities of the now mythic 1960s, as if these were the universal experience of the times. Most young people living in the 1960s were not hippies, believe it or not. In fact, "the Sixties" didn't really begin until the middle part of the decade—Dylan turning the Beatles on to pot in 1964 was probably the turning point—and they only really petered out sometime in the mid-1970s. (I think we can safely conclude that disco marked the definitive end). And, as they say, "if you remember the Sixties, you weren't there!" Still, I dug the flick.

The main criticism I might make of the movie is that it recycles (in post-modern/pastiche style) all the same old tropes, myths, and larger-than-life pop culture events/personalities of the now mythic 1960s. . . .

As far as the contemporary zeitgeist, I haven't been a 20-something for some time now—and I've only seen parodies of it—but I suspect *Across the Universe* is hitching a ride on the "High School Musical" bandwagon charming the cool kids these days. I have to admit, the movie's early football field and bowling alley choreographed numbers (and the later military recruitment scene, with a strong nod to Pink Floyd's *The Wall*) were far out, but in a 2000s kind of way. Similarly, the recurrent appearance of massive, evocative puppets reflects the latest trends in artsy progressive activism (think the World Social Forum), not something you would have seen "back in the day."

Taking a longer view, the moviemakers were simply having a lot of fun with the tried-and-true, rock-'em-sock-'em genre of the classic Broadway musical, generating the same kind of vital energy of a "West Side Story" or "A Chorus Line" (or even a good high school production of "Fiddler on the Roof"). Their content is 1960s rock, but their form is 1950s musical.

Going ever farther back in musical history, the movie gives many of the Beatles' pop songs a Gershwin-style "show tune" setting and spin. This actually rings true to the songwriting of (especially) Paul McCartney, whose dad was a professional musician in a British version of a "big band." Paul knew a good ballad when he saw it ("Yesterday," "Michelle," "Blackbird," "I'll Follow the Sun") and sought to synthesize Cole Porter's sweet smoothness with Little Richard's sexualized shrieks.

And even though I've never taken LSD, I also sensed that the movie's trippy (literally), touchy-feely, Andy Warholesque New York artsy party scene was more indebted to Ecstasy than acid, again in an attempt to resonate with today's kids. (Of course, the relationship between the two drugs is that of mother and daughter.)

The movie's handling of Vietnam had a noticeable Iraq vibe to it. (The relationship of these two wars is more like that of irresponsible father to bastard son.) The movie's juxtaposing of GIs in jungle combat in Vietnam with hippie street protestors back home—with blood flowing in both places, implying some sort of experiential equivalency—would have ticked me off, if I were a Vietnam vet. (My parents were peace church missionaries in Vietnam during the entire decade of America's misbegotten intervention in Indochina—I was born there—so in some sense they can claim to be "veterans" of Vietnam.) The truth of the matter is there were more than a few hippie-grunts in the 'Nam, so the connection is not so much inaccurate as overblown.

More substantially, images of napalm ripping through the Vietnamese countryside—in the "Strawberry Fields Forever"-turned-anti-war-song montage—filled me anew with a visceral revulsion for the demonic horror of high-tech warfare, then as now. Americans need to see such (Middle Eastern) scenes in their living rooms every night, as they did coming from Vietnam, when journalism was actually less sanitized and "embedded"/in bed with the military machine.

Using the romantic couple at the heart of the plot as symbols, the movie also explores tensions between lives committed to the arts as versus activism. I think this probably resonates with today's culturally savvy yet politically concerned youth, who desire healthy models for integrating the two callings.

As far as other hippie connections, I grooved on the movie's imaginative exploration of what a band—and love affair—made up of Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix (never so named) might have looked like: "Me and Bobby Magee" meets "Purple Haze"! As two of the greatest rock stylists of that (or any) era—both of whom died from heroin in the same fateful year of 1970 that witnessed the break up of the Beatles and my beloved Simon and Garfunkel—Janis and Jimi did have something in common. I liked the movie's happy romantic ending for the pair much better than their sad real life outcomes.

U2's Bono—who would tell you he's not worthy to even untie Lennon's sandals—does a cameo turn as Ken Kesey (of the LSD-dosed, Bay Area "Merry Pranksters," not to mention author of *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*). As the movie alludes to, the Pranksters did actually drive their psychedelic bus "Further" ("Beyond" in the movie) across country to commune with Harvard-professor-turned-philosopher-of-acid Timothy Leary in his upstate New York "retreat" center.

Leary refused to meet with them. He had very strict ideas about the proper spiritual-ritual uses of LSD (every religion has its fundamentalists), whereas the Pranksters used it more California style: "Hey dudes, let's drop some acid, jam out with the Dead, party with Hell's Angels, then drive our bus 100 mph down the Pacific Coast Highway." It was like East

Coast rap clashes with West Coast rap. (Thankfully, unlike Tupac and Biggy, neither "guru" got gunned down; that was a gentler time.)

A side note of 1960s lore for you: The briefly glimpsed older guy with a cap at the wheel of the "Beyond" bus is meant to be Neal Cassady, the real-life (speed freak) model for "Dean Moriaty," the anti-hero of Jack Kerouac's beatnik breakthrough *On the Road.* Cassady (who also makes a cameo appearance in Allen Ginsberg's beatnik epic *Howl*) would later party-hardy with hippies like Kesey, too. Neal was found overdosed along some railroad tracks in Mexico circa 1968. Too many hippie stories end like that.

One of the movie's lamest "retro" scenes is its recreation of the unfortunate incident when members of the "Weather Underground"—radical-hippies-turned-terrorists who split off from the "Students for a Democratic Society"—blew themselves up trying to make a bomb.

But the movie is spot-on in its unfolding depiction of a spontaneous coming together of a free-wheeling bohemian household; the group's non-judgmental support for one another through the "highs" and lows of experimenting with new identities; and the equally rapid disintegration of the community. Mixing "free" love and mind-bending drugs is really not the best way to sustain a household. This scene was repeated thousands of times throughout the 1960s and 1970s, in idyllic country communes and grungy city pads alike.

The movie is spot-on in its unfolding depiction of a spontaneous coming together of a free-wheeling bohemian household. . . .

One of the most fun parts of the movie is the creative license taken to give new meanings to old Beatles tunes, in grand postmodern style. "I Want to Hold Your Hand" becomes a lament of unrequited lesbian love among high school cheerleaders. This same Asian-American lesbian, Prudence, is coaxed out of the closest, so to speak, to the tune of "Dear Prudence" ("won't you come out to play?") and joins the movie's motley hippie household when "She Came in Through the Bathroom Window" (an *Abbey Road* tune). "She's So Heavy" here refers to drafted GI grunts groaning under the weight of an imperialist Lady Liberty.

Paul's classic primal scream of "Jude-y, jude-y, jude-y, jude-y" at the climax of "Hey Jude" now depicts an old friend joyously greeting Jude (the main Brit character from Liverpool) at the dock, upon his return to America. (The original "Jude" was John's then five-year-old son, Julian, whom Paul was trying to cheer up after his parents' divorce.)

And the title track of *Across the Universe*—which features John's mantra "nothing's gonna change my world"—is overlaid with images of the main character's world shattering into pieces. All the songs feature such surprising twists out of their original context. Again, I think John would have grooved with this, but purists might find it heretical.

I noticed a disproportionate representation of decidedly off-color, non-hit-single cuts from *The White Album*. Who can forget those old chestnuts, "Why Don't We Do It in the Road?" or "Happiness Is a Warm Gun" (an orgasmic parody of the NRA's fetish for hand-guns), or "Helter Skelter," that apocalyptic, most-heavy-metal of Beatles' tunes that "inspired" Charles Manson to murder and mayhem? This most eclectic, experimental, (and perhaps a tad bit excessive, as double albums are wont to be) of Beatles' albums seems to suit the movie-makers' off-kilter vision well.

The climactic scene revolves around "All You Need is Love," in which Lennon's trail-off sampling of the Beatles earlier "She loves you, yeah, yeah, yeah" already captured brilliantly the full cycle/deep structure meaning of Beatles' music: from "got the girl" excitement to hippie-communal peace and love. The movie gives it yet another layer of meaning, when the "She Loves You" girl (Lucy . . . in the Sky) appears on the far roof and "all's well that ends well," as another lyrical Brit named Bill once said. (I don't want to spoil the ending by explaining this further; you'll have to get the DVD and watch it.)

The grand finale's rooftop concert, by the way, is drawn straight from real Beatles' history: On a lark, the Beatles set up shop one day in 1969 on the roof of their record company, Apple, and jammed out for about a half hour for whoever happened to be passing by on the streets below. It turned out to be the last time the Beatles would ever perform together, as they soon fell apart during the tumultuous production of *Let it Be*.

Please don't be racist and sexist like the rest of the non-John Beatles, who ignobly blamed the break-up on Yoko Ono. Commonsense knows it was their own pig-headed (male) egos and desire for artistic freedom—mixed in with John's voracious appetite for drugs—that destroyed the group (the sad tale of many a lesser band). Fame and fortune will (almost inevitably) destroy friendships. Thankfully, that's no worry of mine, but I'll get by with "a little help from my friends."

One final note: the lead character "Jude" is a wonderful mixing of John and Paul into one. The actor has the face of Paul (the "cute Beatle") but the working-class-stiff-without-a-father-figure-bohemian-artist-wannabe that was at the heart of John's persona (more so than the political activist he eventually strove to be).

Sure, George was a pretty good guitarist and—once Paul and John finally gave him a chance—he wrote some pretty sweet songs ("Here Comes the Sun" being my fave). And Ringo was as good a mascot as a band could hope to find (and kept a steady beat).

But John and Paul were like Mozart and Bach writing songs for the same band. We'll likely never see the likes of that dynamic duo again. (Give *Rubber Soul* or *Revolver* a spin, and you'll know what I mean.)

You may ask why a missionary kid, Christian ethicist-in-training, and pastor's husband like myself has a passion for old Beatles music or repackagings of that bygone era. For starters, Mennonites ought to know better than most that music speaks to the "soul" in a way deeper than preaching.

Second, despite its obvious excesses—and the undeniably destructive side of the hippie lifestyle legacy in post-1960s American life—there is something about that era that continues to capture the imagination and somehow resonates with the eschatological energies that suffuse the New Testament. I find Jesus, Paul, James, Peter, and the Evangelists to be vastly superior spiritual guides to the hippies, mind you; I always found George's simultaneously self-righteous and slippery Eastern moralisms particular insufferable. (I liked his sitar touches, however; they helped pave the way for today's "world music.")

As a Christian looking forward to the resurrection of our bodies and a redeemed communal-ecological life in the "new earth" of a green-belted, ungated, garden-centered, and tree-lined "New Jersualem," I believe history matters. The Beatles helped shape the world we live in today, as their enduring appeal testifies. Plus they really knew how to craft a pop song.

—*Kent Davis Sensenig, Pasadena, California, was born in 1970 and insists this is the last year of the Sixties, making him a flower child of some kind.*

Summer of the Hero

Regina Wenger

It's a Friday night, and I come home exhausted from a long day waitressing. Unlike my sister, I have no grand plans for the evening. So, it looks like I'll be hanging out with Mom and Dad tonight (again). It's every 21-year-old's dream—an evening at home with your parents.

Sometimes I feel like Toula in a scene from "My Big Fat Greek Wedding." She sits between her parents in her pajamas on a plastic-encased couch, the dark room and their eyes illuminated by the glow of the TV screen.

Now don't get me wrong, I don't hate spending time with my parents, nor am I antisocial; I've just lacked time to make friends since we moved. Moving after high school graduation and then heading off to college leaves little opportunity for making friends in a new hometown. Thus my summer social slump occurs.

This summer, after my "I'm lonely" emotional breakdown, Dad decided to remedy the situation the best way he could. The next day, list maker that he is, Dad jotted down a few ideas for activities that would get

me out of the house. His outline included everything from baseball games to whitewater rafting. However, what turned out to be my favorite activity of the summer had nothing to do with being outdoors.

I miss good discussion when I'm away from school, so Dad suggested a weekly breakfast during which an article of our choosing would be discussed. Alternating who chose the selection, we covered topics like gay marriage and prayer in schools. Our last breakfast of the summer was an open-ended Q & A with Dad.

Every Wednesday morning we'd gather at a local coffee shop for our weekly chat. Often we would have to cut things short so we could both get to work on time. I loved the time that we spent together, and it usually made my day better.

In an essay from her book *The Peanuts in My Life*, Leanne Eshleman Benner speaks about naming her father as her hero and not finding any man close to him until she met her husband. In my lack of romantic relationships, that has often been a consolation to me. I haven't dated much because I have yet to find a man that comes close to my father. No man has yet to make me feel as beautiful and worthy as my father does.

Some people search their whole lives to discover their hero; this summer I had breakfast with mine.

If and when I ever find another man who makes me feel this way, I know I'll have landed a catch. Though he'll never fill Dad's shoes, he'll own his own pair, and they'll be just as big. Some people search their whole lives to discover their hero; this summer I had breakfast with mine. Every Wednesday morning.

—*Regina Wenger, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, is a junior at Eastern Mennonite University, who is currently exploring city life through the Washington Community Scholars Center program. Don't worry, a few days after reading this article her dad's head returned to normal size. She welcomes your comments and can be reached at regina.wenger @emu.edu.*

The Enchanted Forest

Deborah Good

I have had babies on my mind. This is not, mind you, because I am thinking about having one myself, but because a number of very good friends of mine are starting to have children—while I spend three days a week in middle schools helping young teens think about *not* becoming parents themselves.

That's right. As a social work intern, I spend Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays in Philadelphia middle schools talking with 12- and 14-year-olds about, among other things, healthy relationship skills, self esteem, sexual harassment, reproductive anatomy, sex, disease, and (yes) birth control and (indeed) how to properly use a condom.

There are those of you whose minds are beginning to sound alarms. I can hear them. *Middle school?? Why are you teaching middle-schoolers about birth control?*

I was asked to explain myself recently while spending an evening with friends I don't see often. After I described my role as a counselor and sex educator in middle schools, one friend looked me in the eyes with earnest conviction and genuine curiosity. "I don't understand," she began. "Why wouldn't you just teach abstinence?"

I responded with what I hope was a thoughtful and honest explanation of why I do what I do. I was glad she asked. And even though you didn't, I will try to explain myself here, too.

Abstinence. The word really sounds more like a chemical compound than a healthy, solid lifestyle decision. Perhaps churches and health curriculums nationwide should first work on spicing up the terminology. Still, the word is highly popular and controversial, especially when it is embedded in phrases like "abstinence-only education" and funded over the past decade by more than 1 billion dollars in federal funding.

But before I move on, let me be clear at the outset. I fully, 150 percent, support teens who decide not to have sex until they are older or even until they are married. These teens take on the challenge of adolescence without needing a condom, even while this particular period of their lives is often accompanied by hormones gone berserk and friends who talk casually about sexual escapades (both real and fabricated). I was one such teen: I did the abstinence thing myself.

For me, however, this is not simply a conversation about when, at what age, or with what marital status it is moral to have sex. When I dig, I discover that at the heart of this conversation is my belief that all of us—men and women, girls and boys—deserve to understand the basics of how our bodies work *and* choosing if and when we want to become parents. We should be given the tools—and the accurate information—we need to make those decisions.

"What do you want to do before you have children?" I sometimes ask my students. *I want to graduate from high school*, say some. *From college*, others. One girl said she hopes to be 28. Most say they want to be married.

The fact is, more than 700,000 teenage girls become parents every year, before they graduate from high school. It is harder to track the boys, who are often absent and even when not usually shoulder far less responsibility. "If men were the ones getting pregnant," I observed to one eighth grade girl, "I bet they'd think twice about having so much sex." Our two smiles were like strands of yarn, linking us to women and girls the world over.

Kids are having both wanted and unwanted sex—well over half of them (varying depending who is counting) before age 18. And if we don't teach them about it, their friends, their boyfriends, and even MTV will.

There is no better place than middle schools to learn of the myths and inaccuracies kids learn outside the classroom. Can men get pregnant? (I'm serious. I've been asked this more than once.) Isn't it true you can't get pregnant the first time you have sex? (*Not* true. Anytime you have sex, you risk pregnancy.) My boyfriend says I can't get pregnant if I'm on my period. (Wrong.) Isn't it better to wear two condoms instead of one? (No, no, no. They are more likely to tear.)

I believe in informed decision-making. Kids who choose abstinence should do so out of knowledge, not ignorance. And those who choose otherwise have even more important decisions to make about preventing the risks of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.

All of us . . . deserve to understand the basics of how our bodies work. . . .

What I am about to say is not earth-shattering news: Sexually active teens who use condoms and contraception are far less likely to contract Chlamydia, get pregnant, or end up at abortion clinics.

Yet the current federal policy around sex education supports exclusively "abstinence-only" programs. They focus on waiting until marriage—often trying to incite fear in students—while teaching nothing about safer sex practices like condom-use or birth control.

Several recent studies, including a 2004 government-sponsored investigation, have found abstinence-only curriculums to be not only ineffective but also scientifically inaccurate. Sixteen states now refuse federal funding for these programs to support comprehensive sex education instead.

Am I losing you in policy and politics? Am I being too argumentative? Let me stop for a moment so I can tell you about my good friend, Charity, whose rounded tummy moves with life. She's due within the month.

Recently, a small crowd of us got together to celebrate the coming birth. We gathered around Charity and her partner, Steve, bringing with us baby wipes and onesies, all wrapped carefully in shades of pastel. All evening we joked and prodded and bribed, hoping we'd trick them into revealing the baby's gender and chosen name. They've chosen to keep these two secrets to themselves and have so far succeeded, despite our efforts. We women huddled around Charity and took turns placing hands on her mountain of belly shrouded uterus, gasping at any movement we felt beneath our palms.

Experiences like this reach down to that awe-center within me, that place of untethered wonder at how new life comes to be. That story, hands down, tops the delivery-by-stork version every day of the week.

I like to imagine puberty as an enchanted forest. Our kids stand at its edge, some tiptoeing and others ready to charge through the brambles. The forest is zany, uncomfortable, and scary. As they enter, we should be doing our best to feed their fascination and provide safe places for them to explore and ask questions. And because we cannot always be by their sides, I vote (and yes, I do mean *vote*) that we give them all the guidebooks and maps we can get our hands on to help them find their way safely through.

—Deborah Good, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, a Master of Social Work student at Temple University, can be reached at can be reached at deborahagood@gmail.com. She wants kids and teens to be safe and would like us to talk about sex more openly. Her friend Julie Prey-Harbaugh, jpreyharbaugh@franconiaconference.org, helps Mennonites do that in an effort to prevent child sexual abuse.

"Juno": Beyond a Cautionary Tale

Dave Greiser

By now, frequent readers know that I have a decided affinity for small, independently produced films that showcase the work of new and rising artists. "Juno," a sleeper hit released at the end of 2007, fits nearly every element in that description. It is a quirky comedy from a new screenwriter and a young director that tackles a socially divisive subject (unplanned teen pregnancy) with a depth and intelligence that transcends the usual ideological divide. In some ways the film is similar to the prior year's "Knocked Up" but with younger characters, softer edges, and a more feminist sensibility.

"Juno" is the second film directed by rising star Jason Reitman ("Thank You for Smoking," his first effort, was reviewed last year in *DreamSeeker Magazine*). It debuted at this year's Toronto Film Festival and was soon picked up for distribution by Fox Searchlight Pictures.

The outstanding script was written by newcomer Diablo Cody, a 29-year-old University of Iowa grad whose earlier writings explored the less family friendly world of strip clubs. The star of the film is 20-year-old Canadian Ellen Page, a remarkable actress whose

character "Juno" somehow manages to combine intelligence, emotional complexity, and wisdom with child-likeness in a way that is genuinely believable. Page is already a performer whose dramatic range and subtlety suggest a bright future.

Synopsis: Juno MacGuff is a smart-mouthed, individualistic junior in a suburban high school made pregnant by her geeky best friend-but-not-quite-boyfriend Paulie Bleeker (played by another excellent newcomer, Michael Cera). Initially, Juno tries to treat her pregnancy as material for a stand-up routine, referring to herself as the "cautionary whale" and phoning the local women's center from the hamburger phone in her bedroom to inform them that she "wants to procure a hasty abortion."

As in the real world, the kids in Juno's world sometimes rise to a level of adult-like behavior while the adults take brief turns being kids.

Juno is confident that she can live with the consequences of her choices, and she seeks no sympathy from her classmates. But a trip to the abortion clinic leaves her cold and lowers her defenses toward motherhood. She decides instead, with the help of a friend, to try to find the perfect adoptive parents for her child.

Together they troll the pages of the local pennysaver where, next to the ads for pets needing homes, they find the photo ad of a well-scrubbed, hopeful-looking yuppie couple (played by a tightly wound Jennifer Garner and wanna-be slacker Jason Bateman) who are looking to adopt. All goes according to plan until the daddy-to-be, with whom Juno comes to share a love of punk rock and slasher films, gets cold feet.

I won't spoil the story's resolution. This is a film which blessedly avoids clichés and conventions. There is little melodrama and no moralizing about abortion, adoption, or even premarital sex, but there is lots of genuine struggle over decisions and the conflicted feelings that invariably accompany them.

The characters are unpredictable and idiosyncratic, which is to say, they are specific and realistic. As in the real world, the kids in Juno's world sometimes rise to a level of adult-like behavior while the adults take brief turns being kids.

Juno's father and stepmother (played by veteran character actors J. K. Simmons and Allison Janney) are confused and disappointed by Juno's situation. They are also wiser, more resourceful, and more supportive than the usual clueless, stick-figure parents peopling most teen-oriented films.

Probably the most satisfying part of my experience in watching this film was finding myself seduced into caring about each character. The first 40 minutes of the film consist of rapid-fire dialogue (not unlike the conversations in TV's "The Gilmore Girls") and one-liners. But at some point it outgrows its TV formula and develops into a real story, the struggle of a too-young mother-to-be agonizing

over decisions that are beyond the capacity of adults, let alone 16-year-olds.

"Juno" is a story that tries to project some hope for a society in which the very concepts of "family" and "friends" seem to be tired and dying. Even though Juno's biological parents are long divorced ("My mom lives with her new husband and three replacement children"), her father and step-mom provide her with stability. Likewise, Paulie, the baby's father, turns out to be a faithful friend even when Juno keeps him at a distance as the pregnancy progresses.

Like another quirky pro-family movie, "Little Miss Sunshine," "Juno" affirms the ability of flawed families and friends to care and to stand by each other. By the time this review gets to its readers, the Oscars will already be history. I predict that "Juno" will land a much-deserved "Best Picture" nomination. See it with a friend or with your own idiosyncratic family.

—*Dave Greiser lives in Hesston, Kansas. He directs the Pastoral Ministries Program at Hesston College.*

Faces in the Sky

Noël R. King

Once, when I was flying in a jumbo jet from Spain to southern Africa, I looked up from my in-flight magazine to see a UFO beside our plane. (I was in a window seat.)

Inside the UFO (it had windows, too), I saw a little face appear and see me through the glass. The little face started making faces at me, pressing its nose and lips against the glass, pulling back its eyelids, etc. It was all very familiar to me, having been a highway traveler many years.

Then a big one of it came and pulled the little one away, and off they sped into the sky.

"Hm," I smiled. "I wonder where *they* are going?"

Then I turned and took a nap.

—*As circumstances warrant, through her Turquoise Pen column Noël R. King, Scottsville, Virginia, reports on strange and wonderful things, including faces in jumbo jet windows on the way to Africa.*

Rehabilitating Anger

Mark R. Wenger

The Bible was open beside me on the bed, turned to Proverbs 16:32. I had been sent to an upstairs bedroom by my mother. Another adolescent tirade had led to the forced retreat—for meditation. The verse still comes to me in King James English: "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city." It wasn't an easy exercise, meditating on that bit of verbiage while seething about an unfair situation.

The same verse came freshly into view recently. The beginning of 2008 seemed to cough up more than its share of bile and bite in my neighborhood: the unremitting presidential primary campaign with attack and sharp rejoinder; an unresolved church disagreement and vocalized suspicions; personal issues like billing disputes, a totaled automobile, and a smashed mailbox.

Truth be told, there came a point in life when I discounted my mother's anger management training as so much psychological pap. College teachers taught another truth about anger. When it is swallowed and repressed, it explodes unpredictably or eats your guts out. Be free to let yourself get angry, to own your resentment, to be real and uncontrived. Better to vent steam in the moment than to lock it in and eventually burst the boiler.

Additionally, I became aware of conflict patterns within the church group that was my religious home. For centuries Mennonites had nurtured the virtue of being humble and quiet in the land. Psychology professors explained that this supposed virtue often expressed itself in classical passive-aggressive behavior that tends to deny anger until it emerges uncontrolled and destructive.

Slowly we were schooled to wear anger as a badge of honor. . . .

The historical record seems to support the thesis: Mennonites have frequently divided and sub-divided. Thus we have been coached to speak up boldly on behalf of ourselves and other injured souls. Righteous indignation has been extolled in the cause of justice and healthy relationships.

The enduring cultural polarities spawned in the 1960s also helped many of us along the road to justified fury. Talk radio, chat rooms, and blogs have added their own spice and verbal insults. Moderation became suspect when so much was at stake: rights, morality, theology, justice, environment, national security, money, family.

More than a few of us learned to take satisfaction in letting others know when we are offended, ticked-off, cheated, and outraged. At one time many of us had been reluctant to admit anger. Slowly we were schooled to wear anger as a badge of honor: "I am angry, and I'm not going to be pushed around!"

The day after a recent small snowstorm, the state snowplow came by to clear the road. Baamm! Our mailbox went flying, caught by the edge of the plow. Three other mailboxes up the street suffered the same fate.

I submitted a damage claim to the local department of transportation. A week later I got a phone call. "The right-of-way from the center of your road is 16 feet; your mailbox is at 14 feet. So I'm sorry that we aren't responsible to pay for damages. On the other hand, if you put your mailbox back to 16 feet, the US Postal Service probably won't deliver the mail because it's too far off the road."

I was happy tell the caller that I was incensed and that government, true to form, was irrational and pathetic. He deserved knowing it. Did I feel better? No.

As a pastor and educator there are times I've been the recipient of others' vented frustration, mistrust, and irritation. It goes with the territory. Sometimes the anger is on target; other times it feels over-the-top, less to do with me and more with the other's issues. Stir in the psychology and culture that encourage militancy of attitude and language, and it gets hot in a hurry. Shoot the Bible bullets, take up a club in the cultural wars, be prophetic and trumpet the truth, make some angry noise!

Angers inevitably surge through the arteries of our body and life together. Anger touches every arena of

human relationship: within the self, between friends, within a marriage, among colleagues, inside families, throughout a congregation. Anger affects business dealings, national policies and religious disputes.

The question is not whether we will deal with anger; the question is—How? There are no pat answers for what to do with anger. Too many variables make it all so hazy and complicated. "Just do it!" we hear.

Yet there is One who has been calling my name recently. She sounds a lot like the voice of my mother. She "stands at the highest point along the way, where the paths meet, and takes her stand; beside the gate leading into the city, at the entrance, she cries aloud." (Prov. 8:2-3, TNIV) Her name is Wisdom.

"Wisdom is what is true and right combined with experience and good judgment" writes Pastor Bill Hybels in a simple, straightforward definition. (*Wisdom: Making Life Work*, 2003). The book of Proverbs—part of the wisdom collection of Scripture—contains hundreds of ancient wise observations for living well.

You don't need a lot of brains to cite exceptions to almost any proverb. For example, Proverbs 28:19 says that "those who work their land will have abundant food, but those who chase fantasies will have their fill of poverty." Yet a 30-year employee loses a job when the factory closes, and a convicted sexual predator wins $5 million in the state lottery.

Proverbs is not a collection of scientific laws or divine promises. Again the words of Hybels, "*Proverbs simply tells how life works most of the time*. You can worry about the exceptions after you have learned the rule. Try to live by the exceptions, and you court disaster." Proverbs is wisdom as distilled common sense.

Not surprisingly, Proverbs has much to say about dangers of anger:

- A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. (15:1)
- Fools give full vent to their rage, but the wise bring calm in the end. (29:11)
- Do not make friends with the hot-tempered, do not associate with those who are easily angered. (22:24)
- For as churning cream produces butter, and as twisting the nose produces blood, so stirring up anger produces strife. (30:33)

Wisdom in acknowledging, managing, and expressing our angers never goes out of style. It is indispensable. The Epistle of James, another book of ancient wisdom, echoes Proverbs. "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because our anger does not produce the right living that God desires." (James 1:19-20) Someone observed that God wisely gave us two ears and one mouth. The implication: to listen twice as much as we speak our minds.

We will not escape anger; it would be foolish and unhealthy to try. Anger hangs at our elbow—an intense energy for good or for destruction.

I wonder, however, whether it's time to relearn an old lesson. To slow down in our anger reactivity. To think, to choose, to focus. To consider again the wisdom of investing anger energy with care. It doesn't take much time or talent to generate a lot of heat for maximum impact. The far greater gift is to stay the course and generate as much light as we can for maximum understanding. That's the way life works best most of the time.

—Mark R. Wenger, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, is Director of Pastoral Studies for Eastern Mennonite Seminary at Lancaster.

Joseph

What did I do to make them hate me so?
I've thought about it often all these years.
And now they're here, hungry and begging grain,
And I've the power to spurn them, jail them, kill them—
Do unto them as they have done to me.

But somehow I've no wish to seek revenge.
I have two sons, and now I understand
How much a father's favor means to them,
How eagerly they count each smile, each frown,
Each word of commendation, each caress,
As if collecting evidence to prove
Who's loved the most. I see how hurt could grow
First to resentment, then to bitter hate.

Was it my fault our father favored me?
No, but did I always have to be
So eager to accept, so arrogant?
That dream I had of bowing sheaves of wheat,
Why did I have to tell it? And that coat,
I could have thanked him, folded it away
To wear on special days, not flaunted it,
A daily insult to their jealous eyes.
But I was young. I didn't understand.

I realize now how much my foolish pride
Inflamed their anger and their jealousy.
Now God has given us this blessed chance
To heal our wounds, be brothers once again
And I forgive, for time has changed my heart.
What they meant for evil, God has turned to good.

—Ann M. Schultz, Rochester, Minnesota

I'm Ready to Listen?

Renee Gehman

I've been working as a teacher in a child care center, with three-year-olds, and I have found myself amazed at the way distinct personalities shine through at even the earliest stages of life. Every day I witness 11 young, distinct personalities developing, interacting, and causing me to find profundity in the simplest of things.

Teachers are not supposed to show favoritism in the classroom, and I try not to. But one can't help but feel drawn to certain people, and that is how it is for me with Max. It might be his dimples. It could be his big brown eyes. But I think too that what connects me with Max is an independent and stubborn spirit with which I resonate.

At nap time, Max has two tasks while I rub the backs of his classmates to help them fall asleep: lie on his cot and rest quietly. Instead, he is talking to himself, claiming to need the bathroom, telling me daily in the best scolding parent voice he can muster, "You don't paint on the walls . . . you don't paint on the walls . . . ." (He repeats a lot of what he says about seven times before considering it communicated.) Some days, he is stealing away from his cot to wander about; other times he is jumping up and down on top of it.

But the thing that gets me most is when, at my wit's end, I banish Max and cot to the hallway, where he can't distract others who are trying to sleep. Because what he'll inevitably do next is get off his cot, sit at the edge of the doorway, and call out to me, "I'm ready to listen . . . I'm ready to listen . . ." as if this is grounds for revoking his exile.

Am I not understanding the essence of listening necessary for an authentic relationship with God?

The fact that he is telling me he's ready to listen at the very same moment he is doing the only two things he's not supposed to be doing is half exasperating (he's missing the point) and half just plain humorous (he is three and adorable).

This scenario led me to wonder if God encounters in me the same issue that I do with Max. Even as I pray and claim to listen for God's voice, am I not understanding the essence of listening necessary for an authentic relationship with God?

What does it mean to be ready to listen? I'm not sure exactly, and there are various factors that could be involved. Jews who pray at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem wear prayer shawls and pray out loud. When the verbal prayers around them get too loud and become distracting, they pull their shawls more tightly around their heads, so they can focus more intensely on their own conversation with God.

I love this paradoxical image of covering one's ears so as to help better hearing, but Max's issue is not with the distraction of the noise around him. Rather, it is that he does not understand that part of readiness to listen is a posture of obedience.

Samuel was a man who was known for listening to God's voice, and in fact God and Samuel were in direct communication, even though "in those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions" (1 Sam. 3:1b). God gave Samuel visions. He told him, twice, whom to appoint as king. He was with Samuel always and "let none of his words fall to the ground" (3:19b).

Still, God called Samuel several times before God would say anything more than his name. The first three times Samuel heard the voice, he thought it was Eli. It wasn't until Samuel, prompted by his priestly mentor, said "Speak Lord, for you servant is listening," that God began to reveal things to Samuel.

Why wouldn't God clarify things for Samuel and start talking until Samuel used that phrase? Why couldn't he, when Samuel mistook God's voice for Eli's, explain, "No Samuel, it's me, God. I want to use you as a judge, and as a prophet to Israel, so listen up,"?

As I would not let Max back in the room because he wasn't really proving his readiness to be obedient, I wonder if God waited to engage in serious communication with Samuel until Samuel showed his true readiness to listen and obey.

I think about the usual nature of my prayers: God, be with this or that person in need. God, give me discernment in this or that relationship and help me to follow your will. God, tell me what I am supposed to do with life. These are good things to pray about, all validated in Jesus' invitation to bring to him our burdens.

Yet when I wait for answers that don't seem to come, is that because I'm praying with my own desired answer in mind? What would happen if instead I allowed an earnest desire to obey the voice of God to override my own will?

Max assumed that if he used the correct words he could get what he wanted—reentry to the classroom. I too have asked for things of God, focused mainly on what I or someone close to me could get out of it.

But if the idea of obedience is understood, and prayers come out of the core desire to listen as student to teacher, or child to parent, perhaps then I can say with certainty that yes, I am ready to listen.

—*Renee Gehman, Souderton, Pennsylvania, is assistant editor,* Dreamseeker Magazine*, and an apprentice listener.*

Peacemaking at a New Frontier?

Daniel Hertzler

At Peace and Unafraid: Public Order, Security and the Wisdom of the Cross, edited by Duane K. Friesen and Gerald W. Schlabach. Herald Press, 2005.

Just Policing, Not War: An Alternative to World Violence, edited by Gerald W. Schlabach. Liturgical Press, 2007.

These two books have a common theme and a common approach: get a group of scholarly types together and read papers. Gerald W. Schlabach has been involved with both of these efforts. Gerald grew up as a Mennonite, served in Central America with Mennonite Central Committee and later joined the Catholic Church. He is Associate Professor of Theology at the University of Saint Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota; a member of Saint Peter Claver Catholic Church in St. Paul; and an associate member of Faith Mennonite Church in Minneapolis.

The first book is the result of a two-year process called "The MCC Peace Theology Project" which used five researchers, five regional consultations and one international conference. In addition to an introduction and conclusion, the 21 chapters appear in two

parts: "In Search of Security: Wisdom and a Gospel of Peace" and "Seeking the Welfare of the City: Essays on Public Peace, Justice and Order."

The book is a veritable grab bag of insights. It addresses what we all need to give attention to: how to preserve and practice the radical Anabaptist tradition of love to all when we live in a society which is more concerned with order and security.

As stated in the Foreword, "Questions about the role of Christians in shaping society will never go away. Christians who resolve to live as peacemakers will continue to struggle with the need for order, wondering whether we can envision structures for order and society that do not rely on violence" (15). Duane Friesen describes the task as first of all "to learn our own language well" and the "ethical practices that mark the body of Christ."

In addition, he says, "We need to employ wisely at least four additional languages: prophetic witness, Christian vocation, the common good in democratic discourse, and middle axioms" (53). Middle axioms is a concept from John Howard Yoder, who observed that it is possible to call political entities to live up to their own standards even if they do not fully accept ours. Thus "For example, a government that is not committed to principled nonviolence may be held accountable to do everything in its power to seek a just peace without violence" (59). This multilingual stance serves as an introduction to the wide ranging message of the book.

Writers represent theology (Lydia Harder), Bible teaching (Mary H. Schertz), and activism (J. Daryl Byler and Lisa Schirch). Of particular interest to me are examples from Latin America: 1) Columbia, where a Mennonite peace position has become well enough known for some to ask for counsel on how to deal with issues of political rights; and 2) Paraguay, where some Mennonites have been appointed to government office.

Mennonite historian John D. Rempel reflects on the threats facing Mennonites in the effort to be faithful to the peace tradition.

Mennonite historian John D. Rempel reflects on the threats facing Mennonites in the effort to be faithful to the peace tradition. He finds four divergent perspectives among Mennonites on how to view the world: "separatist, prophetic, priestly, and realist" (353). He observes that how each views their relation to culture directs how they work at peacemaking.

He notes that the Anabaptist Pilgram Marpeck, whom he views as having been prophetic, left no ongoing tradition. The prophetic stance has been difficult to maintain without "augmenting it with elements of the separatist, priestly and realist stances. . . . Unfaithfulness threatens when one of the augmenting elements takes over the prophetic one" (361).

Chapter 19 by Gerald W. Schlabach describes his personal concern to relate "Just Policing and the Christian Call to Nonviolence," which is the subject of the second book. I myself have had difficulty seeing "just war" as other than an oxymoron, but there are those who take this theory seriously, and Schlabach takes such people seriously. He proposes that if "just" is restricted to "policing" and not "war" there's something to talk about.

Schlabach observes that the difference between police action and warfare is that the former is subject to law and accountability and the latter is not. He describes what he sees a theory of just policing would require of "just-war affirming" churches on one hand and "Historic Peace Churches" on the other. In sum, he proposes that each side must be clear regarding what methods of policing they are prepared to support. Will Mennonites agree that police are necessary? If so, are they prepared to help with policing?

Schlabach's chapter in this book anticipates what he has attempted to do in *Just Policing, Not War*, a more tightly organized book which considers this specific subject in some detail. Schlabach himself has written three chapters and is joined by a number of other theorists and practitioners.

In case anyone needed to be convinced, Ivan J. Kauffman reviews the unhappy record of Christians killing Christians. He proposes, however, that after the "Gandhian Revolution" there is evidence that injustice can be opposed without resorting to violence. Then Glen Stassen applies the formula to the fight against terrorism. And Schlabach takes two chapters in discussion of his theory of just policing versus just war with comparisons between Catholic and Mennonite thinking.

The survey is thorough and the reasoning is careful, but there seems to be a theoretical "what if" tone about his discussion. What else could there be? Schlabach is sensitive to both sides of the dilemma in seeking common understanding. In the end he proposes a concept of "vocation" as the task of Mennonite pacifists—but recognizes this can easily become patronizing in the Niebuhrian manner with Mennonites seen as nice to have around but not to be taken seriously.

Schlabach concludes that "In a divided Christian church we must presume that history and circumstances have made some gifts, lessons, and words from the Lord relatively inaccessible to some Christians, though intended for all. In this situation the very vocation of Christian pacifist communities may well be to offer a living, socially embodied argument that nonviolence is normative for all" (106).

Three more basically theoretical chapters follow in the last of which Reina C. Neufeldt imagines a world where new paradigms of constructivism and globalization replace the worn out constructs of liberalism vs. realism. "Does this allow us to imagine a world where just community policing is used to maintain order beyond the state? The future holds many possibilities" (165). Yes, of course, but we wonder who will be listening. As she writes, "The next task is to test the machinery and ensure it will fly" (167).

From here it is some relief to move to John Paul Lederach's chapter, "The Doables: Just Policing on the Ground." Throughout his professional life, Lederach has combined theorizing and practicing. He is able to ask, "What practices are readily available that connect to the framework of just policing?" (175). He proposes "a shift toward human security as the guidepost, rather than national security" (188). He observes, of course, that "the most significant point of diversion still remains the point where Christians in the two traditions debate whether just policing must require exclusively nonviolent methods" (189).

Christiansen writes at length about changes that need to happen to both Catholic and Mennonite churches to make coming together on issues of war and peace believable.

As a pacifist, Lederach has regularly been at work in efforts to ameliorate conflict. In addition he was involved in the development of the Center for Justice and Peacemaking at Eastern Mennonite University. This program provides graduate academic study as well as seminars on conflict transformation for persons from around the world. More recently Lederach has moved on to Notre Dame University.

The final chapter in the book is by Drew Christiansen, identified as a consultant to the International Catholic-Mennonite dialogue from 2000-2004. This seems to have been a most remarkable happening: After some 400 years, instead of being persecuted Mennonites have become conversation partners with Catholics. Indeed this book itself is "Dedicated, with gratitude, to the peacemaking legacies of John Howard Yoder and John Paul II."

Christiansen writes at length about changes that need to happen to both Catholic and Mennonite churches to make coming together on issues of war and peace believable. Organizationally, the two are so different it is hard to imagine an effective combined strategy. Catholics are hierarchical and Mennonites congregational. Also, a just war tradition opens the average Catholic to an assumption about violence which many Mennonites would find problematic.

Yet, he says, "the president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, in fact, has declared that the just war has gone the route of the death penalty. That is, it may be permissible in principle, but in practice it is no longer applicable." He adds that "As Gerald Schlabach has insisted, the real issue for the vast community of the Catholic Church is how to make just policing a truly Christian charism and not simply the baptism of the warrior ethos" (210).

The book includes a 17-page bibliography. Eight of the sources listed are credited to John Paul II and 15 to John Howard Yoder.

If, as John Rempel observes, Mennonites cannot expect to maintain their prophetic peace witness without support from other Christians, this Catholic-Mennonite dialogue provides a point of reference for anyone serious about such issues and prepared to address them.

In *The Mennonite* for Jan. 8, 2008 is a list of the "top 10" news stories carried in the publication in 2007. Included is a photo of Mennonite World Conference president Nancy Heisey presenting "a framed image of Anabaptist martyr Dirk Willems to Pope Benedict XVI." Nancy Heisey and the Pope? If we have seen this, perhaps we can imagine greater things to come. Is peacemaking really at a new frontier?

—Daniel Hertzler, Scottdale, Pennsylvania, is chair of the elders, Scottdale Mennonite Church.

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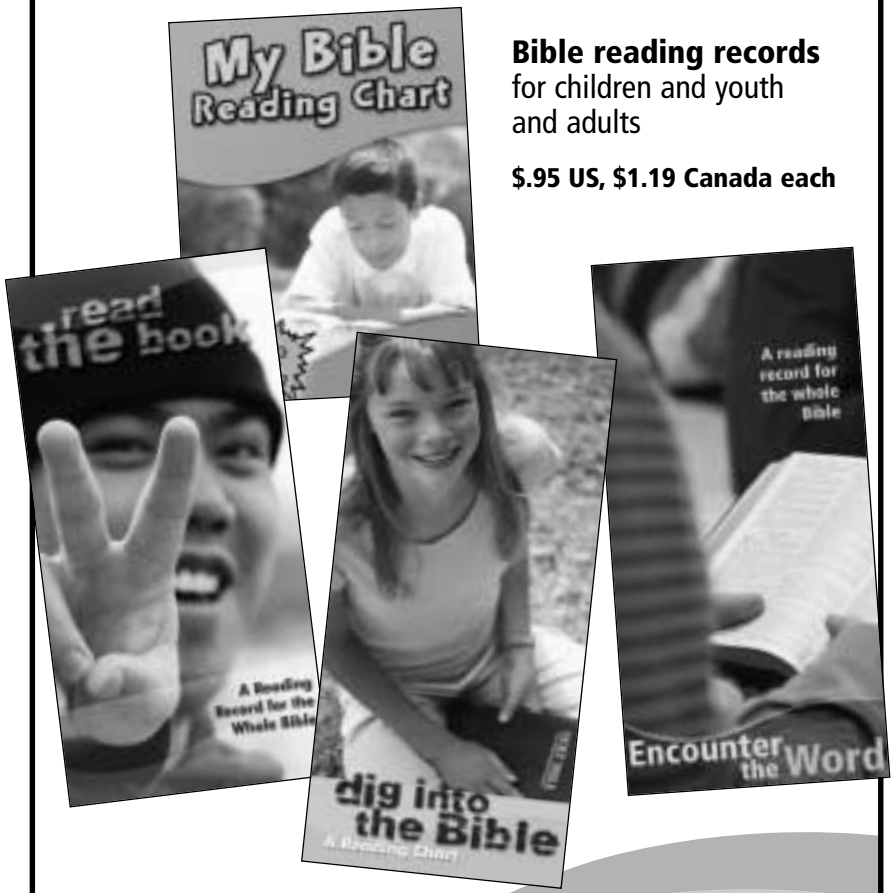

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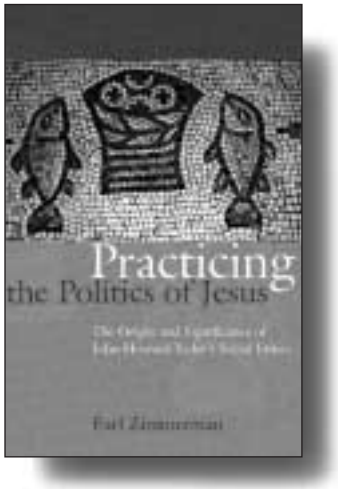

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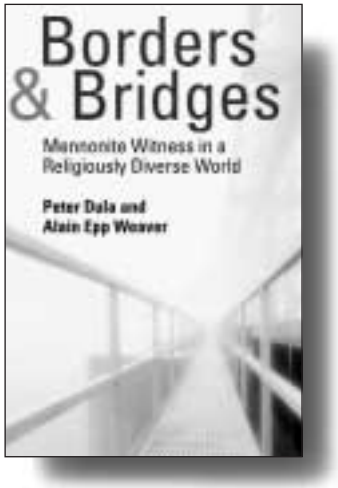

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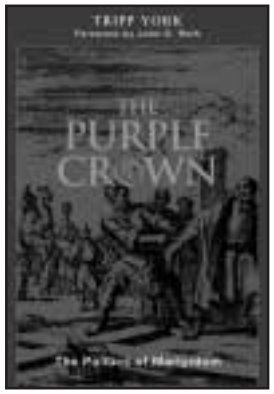

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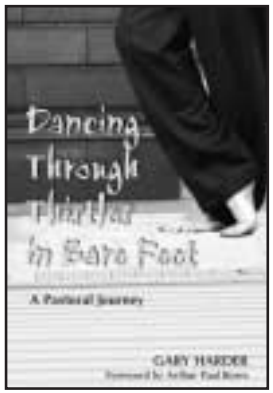

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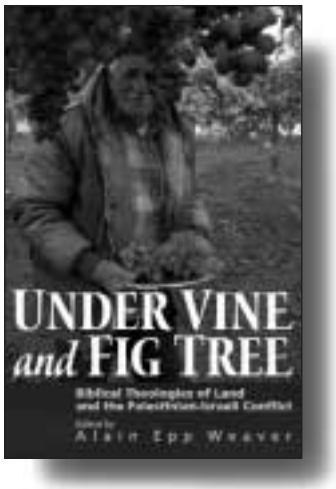

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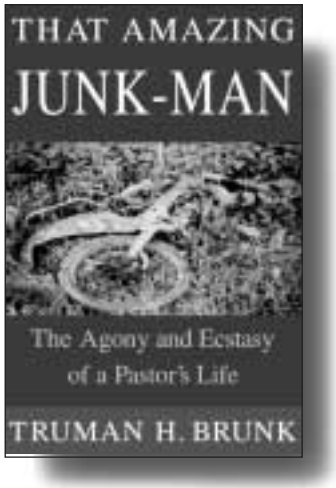

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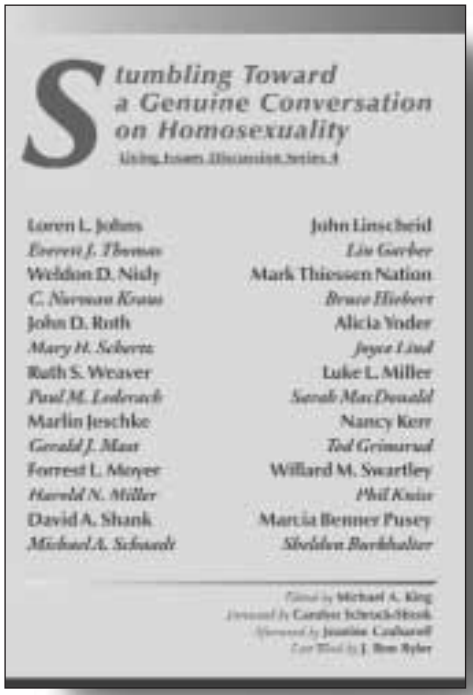

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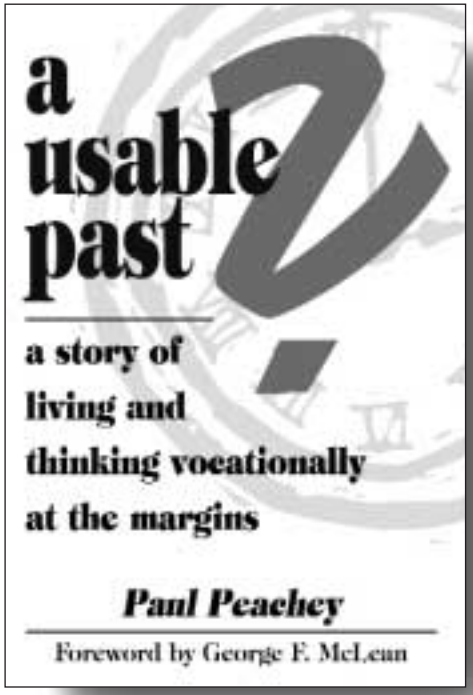

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Pulling Taffy with Mom

We stretch out the pearly white
cord, forcing the candy taut
in both directions. Our hands meet
again in the middle. We tug. Its texture
thickens and tears. Mom tells me
how she used to do this
at Lewis County Mennonite youth parties,
a collection of shy girls in prayer coverings
and guys smelling of cows
they just milked, pulling until the taffy
is stiff and brittle. We cut. Small pieces

scatter on the kitchen counter.
Mom says that after she cut her hair,
turning the back of her cropped curls
on those bishops' teachings about length
and beauty, she could reach the high notes
of hymns better. As the sweets harden,

Mom recalls how she and her siblings
would meet in the haymow after a day
of cutting and driving tractors.
They'd build a labyrinth of bails
and travel this maze until the sun dropped
below the paneless windows,
until she crawled holes through
her thick wool stockings. We take a bite
and smile over a bowl full
of tastes, stony and sweet.

—*Debra Gingerich, Sarasota, Florida, is author of* Where We Start *(DreamSeeker Books, 2007) the collection of poetry from which this poem comes. "To My Yugoslavian In-Laws," another poem in the collection, was read by Garrison Keiller on "Writer's Almanac," August 23, 2007.*