

RHUBARB

A PUBLICATION OF THE MENNONITE LITERARY SOCIETY

Fall 2009, Issue Number 23

10th ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

What has shaped the writing life?

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ular the Manitoba Arts Council, and
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who have provided support for this
issue.

News release

Rhubarb is celebrating its tenth anniversary this year. The magazine is run by a small but exuberant organization called the Mennonite Literary Society, whose board members include the likes of such authors as Armin Wiebe, David Elias, and Lois Braun, while the advisory board includes, among others, Rudy Wiebe and Aganetha Dyck.

We are proud of our satisfied readership. Paul Steury, a contributor to the Stewardship issue, said: "People loved the magazine and were shocked to find a Mennonite Literary Environmental magazine—but they shouldn't be!" In response to the recent issue on War and Peace, William and Helen Krueger wrote, "The last issue was superb! I don't like cynicism but I do like honesty, courage, and insight."

The Mennonite Literary Society formed when another venerable magazine, the Mennonite Mirror, ceased publishing in 1990, after a run of 20 years. With a small bank account and a zest for Mennonite culture, brothers Victor and Garry Enns and architect Rudy Friesen laid the foundations for a different approach and a different format. Where the Mennonite Mirror was a newsy, general interest kind of magazine, the new regime advocated an emphasis on art and literature for and by Mennonites. Governance endeavoured to switch from the corporate non-profit model to a membership-based organization. The name "Rhubarb" reflects the penchant of prairie folk for gardens, the important place of that particular fruit (or is it a vegetable?) in Mennonite cuisine, and the stimulating dialogues that often take place between baseball players and umpires, for Mennonites do love to question everything.

Rhubarb's mandate, however, has evolved along with the changing times, and where its audience was once clear and well defined, it no longer claims to publish primarily for those of Mennonite culture. Nor does it cater to the traditional conservative tendencies the world ascribes to Mennonites. The magazine now and has always published work that many will find challenging and even occasionally offensive. It also welcomes submissions from anyone who meets its quality standards, not just Mennos.

Rhubarb is an independent magazine designed to provide an outlet for the (loosely defined) Mennonite voice, reflect the changing face of the Mennonite community, promote dialogue, and encourage the Anabaptist tradition of reformation and protest.

Rhubarb is looking for contemporary art and writing of excellence. Writing should be clear, stimulating and persuasive without being didactic. Rhubarb publishes poetry, drama, creative non-fiction and short fiction (generally, 2,000-2,500 words or less), and black and white artwork and high-contrast photographs that reproduce well. Rhubarb also publishes humour, book reviews, commentary and articles related to theme.

Send submissions electronically or by surface mail to:

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606 - 100 Arthur St.
Winnipeg, MB R3B 1H3
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TEN YEARS AND COUNTING

To mark its tenth anniversary, Rhubarb magazine asked ten stars of the Mennonite literary world to each make a list of those things that inspired and influenced them as writers. We also invited renowned Canadian artist Wanda Koop to contribute a piece of art to grace the cover. The Mennonite Literary Society Board was encouraged to weigh in on the influences question, and here is their response....

Lois Braun

When I was a child, a small library in my father's den consisted of books neither of my parents had read. I have no idea where the books came from—a mail-order book club, I think, which my mom may have subscribed to accidentally; or maybe she just needed to fill up the shelves in that new room in our new house. At an early age, I'd pull those books from the shelves and try to make sense of the unillustrated stories between their covers. Finding I couldn't, I drew pictures on the endpapers and flyleaves instead.

Then, when I was in Grade 5, a new girl in school brought with her a deep lust for literature and an intimate knowledge of the meaning of the word imagination. She and I worked our way through the school library like hungry locusts in a field and wrote poetry and stories ourselves. To the mini-library in my house I began adding books I'd bought at the Friesens bookstore in Altona.

And at last, when I was 13 or 14, I pulled Herman Wouk's *Marjorie Morningstar* from my parents' collection, the title having titillated me since I was old enough to read it, was captivated by the exotic world it portrayed—New York City, Jews, sex, the theatre—and became fully enchanted with adult fiction. I read *Marjorie Morningstar* several more times in my teens and 20s, as well as the other books from our den library. Few were what you would call "high art." They were books that no one had purposely chosen, but which helped shape me into a literate and literary being.

David Elias

Just as a single act of affirmation may inspire us to enter uncharted waters in search of our creativity, another, of doubt, may plunge us into a miasma from which we struggle to emerge for years or even decades. Imagine a one-room school in Haskett, Manitoba, where the grade fives have been given a creative writing assignment. A boy writes a poem about a dragon that he feels quite proud of, if only for the rhyme scheme (which, he's certain, would meet with the approval of Ogden Nash). But the teacher adamantly refuses to believe that this boy is, in fact, the author of the poem, and accuses him

then and there of plagiarism, in front of the entire class.

The dagger of this humiliation leaves a wound that's slow to heal, and since the boy has no desire to risk a repeat of the incident, thinks it best not to write much of anything for a long, long while. In fact, it isn't until he's well into his thirties that he decides to give it another try. And then, to his surprise, he finds himself able to draw a kind of energy from the incident. Smiles to think that, all these years later, it could become a source of inspiration for him.

Garry Enns

When I read a Mennonite author I have some basic expectations. Certainly, I am looking for a story that will capture my imagination, draw me into a time and place I may not know, and provide me with new insights into the human condition. And I'm looking for that Mennonite sensibility refined by the prairie experience. Some time ago, when I read Arnold Dyck's *Koop 'n' Bua* to my junior high students in Reinfeld, Manitoba, I was surprised by their enthusiasm, by their sheer delight to have discovered stories about their culture and community. Their response demonstrates the importance of hearing one's own voice in what we read.

Even when the themes presented by an author are outside the Mennonite experience, I still look for the "Mennonite voice" that is brought into the story. Armin Wiebe and David Bergen come to mind. Also, anybody who wants to explore the roots of Mennonite literature in Manitoba/Canada really needs to spend some time with the writings of Arnold Dyck and Rudy Wiebe.

Paul Hiebert's *Sarah Binks* is one of those Canadian classics that captures the twinkle in the eye of the author and shares an imagined corner of the prairies that seems to become more real with each reading. A real treasure.

John Goossen

Elementary School: Bernard Palmer, Franklin Dixon, Mel Lyle—mysteries started my adventure in reading. The *Sugar Creek Gang* and *Danny Orlis* got me quietly through the hour of German church and

after that the Hardy Boys and Power Boys took over. Enough suspense and intrigue to occupy an elementary school mind and the stories always wrapped up nicely.

High School: Steinbeck—hated the ones I was supposed to read in grade eight (*The Pearl* and *The Red Pony*) but discovered him anew the next year after a friend recommended *East of Eden*. Then proceeded to read every other one the school library had. Somehow I missed *Winter of our Discontent* but recently found it at a garage sale and completed my reading.

Bradbury, Wyndham, Heinlein and a bit of Clarke—the science-fiction phase, also occurring during high school. Didn't really get into Asimov or make the move to fantasy other than *Lord of the Rings*. The suspense of Bradbury's *Something Wicked This Way Comes* still makes me shiver.

University: a search for heritage. After a university course in German Lit in Translation, I read through German authors—Boll, Brecht, and Grass. And of course spent time with the Russians, more Dostoyevsky than Tolstoy.

Now: All over the map!

Sarah Klassen

I grew up with an insatiable appetite for stories in a house that contained few books besides the Bible and hymnbook. The rhythm and poetry of Luther's German Bible became so entrenched in my consciousness that when it finally occurred to me that in an English speaking country I should be reading the King James Bible, the switch became a project so daunting I nearly gave it up.

Before I started school a new book arrived by mail: a German Fibel, dull brown with dull text. My father had ordered it to ensure that his children would learn to read and write in German before they encountered English. With so little choice in books, no book was dull to me and I sat willingly at the table while my mother washed the dishes and guided me through the book and into literacy. In German.

In our one-room school the teacher read to us—Heidi and *Sowing Seeds in Danny*—while I read my way steadily through the tiny library. A collection of Norse myths with their violent conflicts provided robust nourishment. Our school had an old gramophone, and among the few recordings were two operas: Verdi's *Aida* and *Il Trovatore*, with accompanying plot summaries. I read them over and over, intrigued by the exotic adventures and dramatic love stories as much as by the music reproduced on scratchy recordings.

When I was in grade four I tuned in regularly

when the junior high grades were reading the assigned Shakespearean play. I remember waiting for each day's segment of the plot as eagerly as soap fans wait for the next installment of *The Young and the Restless*.

Along with conflict and plot I was absorbing the rhythms and music of language, Shakespeare's iambic pentameter, the Jewish Bible's parallel structures and contrasts and imagery. These remain embedded in my memory along with the landscape of grey lakes, unremarkable poplar bush with thick undergrowth, and the dusty highway that passed our farm leading south to the big city or north to the white summer beaches, both destinations exotic and beyond reach.

Paul Krahn

The Bible: I recall listening, from under the coffee table in the farmhouse in Ontario, to recordings of Old Testament stories: King Saul, David and Goliath, Samuel, and so on. Later Mom read aloud from the Psalms and Proverbs at lunch hour during my high school years.

The bookstore: Dad sold Christian books in the Bible Book Shop in Winkler. I worked there and, during the slow times, read from the classic "not specifically Christian but safe to read" shelf stocked with Mark Twain, Herman Melville, and John Bunyan. When Dad decided to carry Armin Wiebe I watched an otherwise conservative father sell Yasch Siemens under the counter, despite public pressure (most in Winkler misread the double-dike, but couldn't abide Emmanuel's torture), because he felt that if people wanted to read it, they should be able to buy it.

Nikolai Saloff-Astakoff: My great uncle, who wrote the "true" story, *Judith*, Martyred Missionary of Russia. This white-haired and mustachioed legend of my childhood was the first person I knew who was a writer. I'm still drawn to the gravity and manner of the Russian writers: Dostoyevsky, Solzhenitsyn, Chekhov, Tolstoy, Gogol.

Spy novels: In my late teens I read John Le Carre's *A Perfect Spy* and other fiction like it, that, besides relentless movement, revealed a character's back-story slow and steady to the very end. The first time this all fell into place over the course of a complex plot I was astonished. After subsequent reads, I realized that all the pieces fit together because the author had complete control. He was God. He could go back over it and get it right—if he wanted or needed to.

The toilet: Gifted with the slow bowels of my mother, I won't sit down without *The New Yorker*, Harper's, or, if necessary, a novel, preferably McCarthy, perhaps Bukowski, sometimes Coetzee **R**

THE ANXIETY OF INFLUENCE

David Bergen was born in the fishing village of Port Edward, British Columbia, in 1957, and presently lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba. He has a Bachelor of Education degree and, aside from writing, he has worked as a teacher, brick-layer's helper, carpenter, and orderly. The author of five novels and one collection of stories, his work has won several awards: the John Hirsch Award for Most Promising Manitoba Writer; the Canadian Literary Award for Short Story; and the McNally Robinson Book of the Year award. His novel *The Time in Between*, inspired by the six months he and his family lived in Viet Nam, won the Giller Prize in 2005. His latest novel is *The Retreat*.

David Bergen

At some level, my novels are my anxiety, and the anxiousness extends to include doubt, sex, and shame.¹ In the beginning was the father², and because there can be no father without the son, the father was happy to greet the son. There was, in the beginning, the word³ as well, but that was not discovered until later, when I sat by my mother⁴ and heard the words of John Bunyan, and then later, at the age of eight, because I had run out of books to read, I skimmed the back of the Kellogg's Corn Flakes box. What marvelous words. And what a grasping infelicitous sojourner Bunyan created: "Yes, my wife and children saw me at the first, and called after me to turn again: also, some of my neighbors stood crying and calling after me to return; but I put my fingers in my ears⁵, and so came on my way."



I was not guided in my reading. I simply threw my bucket into the well and accepted whatever appeared. Authors⁶ had names, and I began to go back to those whose voices seemed special. And from these voices I learned to write. Not only tonally but structurally. At the age of twenty-one I discovered *The New Yorker*.⁷ I saw, quite simply, that one could be just dropped down, bang, into a story. I saw that spaces were used to indicate movement in geography or time. I did not know this. I did not know yet that imitation and theft were important. During my years at university⁸ I wrote a paper in a creative fashion and was accused of plagiarism. The professor, a self-proclaimed critic, thought that it was too good, that I had lifted a passage from J. D. Salinger. This was flattering, and though it was not true, I had been aware of Mr. Salinger as I wrote the piece. Beware the influence of critics.

These days, along with Plato and Cicero, I have been reading Bellow⁹ and asking myself, "Is this not enough to make a person full of ecstasy¹⁰?" To be so clear, to write so well as to make one believe in the return of the dead.

¹ Perpetual longing, the early influences of Updike and a specific story of his called "Wife-Wooing," with its womblike allusions, and I, being twenty-two, doing a very poor imitation of that story, and later, at the age of thirty-six, bowing once more before the altar of Updike and creating Johnny Fehr, an



Anabaptist Rabbit, lover of cock and coin. Everything about Updike spoke to me: his Pennsylvania upbringing, his faith, his description of common lives, his awareness of shame, his honesty. He combined sex and death and God in a way that was admirable and worth imitating.

² Up until I arrived at my mid-twenties, my father, who was born in Russia, kissed me directly on the mouth in greeting. He begat me. He kissed me. I betrayed him.

³ In my case, as few words as possible. Having failed at imitating Updike's high style, I arrived at Terry Eagleton's notion of the "Protestant animus against the ornamental... a monkish distaste for swollen rhetoric." And so I discovered Beckett and

Pinter and, of course, Hemingway, the master of paucity/weight.

⁴ Such as we are made of, such we be.

⁵ I put my fingers in my ears. Sounds like a writer, stopping his ears, drowning out the voices of the tempters and nay-sayers. This is the influence of nonalignment, in my case born from a necessity to be an individual in a large and pious family. He who has ears, let him hear.

⁶ I was first affected by the Old Testament writers and the stories of Joseph and David and Solomon. Then by pulp writers like Zane Grey. I am still influenced by a penchant for narrative pull. Then there was Irwin Shaw, who I read in my late teens. And then I discovered Mr. Updike. Then Raymond Carver and Hemingway and Flannery O'Connor and Chekhov and Cormac McCarthy, who is Biblically mythic and sometimes overwrought. Graham Greene has been a model.

⁷ I spent my lunch hours at college, hidden in a small room, poring through old New Yorkers. I was, in the words of Junot Diaz, "Sort of like someone who never had vitamin C their whole life. They're dying from fucking intellectual scurvy and rickets, and somebody gives them a fucking orange."

⁸ Two professors at University of Winnipeg forced me to look at the world. Dr. Clementine Wyke, who taught me Neoclassical and Romantic literature, pursued me with tough philosophical questions; they were layered in a way I had never before encountered. I was flabbergasted. He taught me how to read John Keats and Samuel Johnson, and in doing so he showed me in some small way how to read myself. Dr. Carl Ridd was another professor who had a profound effect on me. He took me upriver with Conrad. He offered me a view into the dark soul of Ivan Ilyich. He never wavered from asking tough questions. He had great faith in imagination. At some point, I fell in love with him. I recall writing a short story (this was during that long period before I was published) and I wanted to show him this story, because his opinion mattered. I suppose I also wanted to impress him in some way. I never did show him the story. Which is fine; it was not very good.

⁹ In an anxious nod to my sources and influences, Morris Schutt, the main character in my next novel, thinks: "I am not Bellow's Herzog; I am not a freethinker, and I am not going mad, but like Herzog, I will persist. I will keep thinking."

¹⁰ And so the snake swallows its tail. Ecstasy: The state of being distracted by some emotion; a frenzy, a stupor, from Greek ekstasis, put out of place. Like sex, writing can bring on a frenzy, a stupor. It is a descent into a brief madness, like speaking in tongues. It is a gift. It cannot be demanded at will. **R**

WHENEVER I AM ASKED

Sandra Birdsell is the daughter of a Russian-born Mennonite and Métis father who met in Morris, Manitoba, at the Scratching Chicken Hotel. Her mother worked at the hotel as an upstairs maid, and her father worked downstairs apprenticing as a pool shark and barber. Born in Hamiota, Manitoba, Birdsell later attended the University of Winnipeg and the University of Manitoba. Besides serving in mentorship programs and as Writer in Residence at numerous universities, her many accomplishments also include *Night Travellers*, (winner of the Gerald Lampert Award); *The Missing Child*, (winner of the 1990 Books in Canada First Novel Award); *The Chrome Suite* and *The Two-Headed Calf* (both short-listed for Governor-General's Awards); and *The Rusländer*. She currently resides in Regina, Saskatchewan.

Sandra Birdsell

Whenever I'm asked what influences have shaped my life and writing—in this instance, ten influences—I feel as though I've been sent to go out fishing on a lake, to cast about here and there and reel in a book, an event, a mentor; something trophy-size that I can point to as being a defining influence. I have never been able to do that. Not once have I had an aha! moment. All the influences have become this body of water, the lake that is my life, and it is impossible for me to know where one influence leaves off and another begins.

Well, perhaps, except for this: 1948, a day in late spring.

I had just turned six years old and was going along the dirt road to my grandparents' house. They lived near the Red River and in spring there had been an unusual high flooding that left them with ruined furniture and rippled floors and a silt line up the walls. I was hurrying along when the ground before my feet gave way to a large sinkhole that hadn't been there yesterday. A torrent of water rushed along below, a turbulent and angry looking stream; flood water finding its way back to the river. One step further and I might have been carried away underground and likely never seen again. My first thought was of the mystery of my disappearance to my family, and the second was that I could not take for granted that a dirt road was just a dirt road, and from now on I would need to pay closer attention.

And this: A day in summer when my sister's skin turned yellow and she threw pieces of fruit at me.

She was two years older than I was, and had dark brown eyes. When we were on the teeter-totter, to tease me she would sing at the top of her voice, "Beautiful, beautiful, brown eyes, I'll never love blue eyes again," and then she laughed and laughed as I went off to complain. Soon after she was moved out of my bedroom to my parents' room, and during the day she lay on a cot in the dining room next to the chimney. One morning when her skin had already turned yellow, she threw an orange at me, saying, catch! and then an apple, food she



was no longer able to keep down. That summer she lay in her little white coffin and my sisters and I lined up on one side of it in our white organdy dresses as it descended into the earth. For years my mother kept an arrangement of flowers from the funeral in a closet, and whenever I came across that musty dry smell I was reminded that my sister's last word to me had been catch!; that I had eaten the fruit she'd thrown at me; and of her disappearance.

And this: A vacation in St. Boniface.

"That boy is such a terrible liar," Grandmère Berthelet said to me of my cousin Gerald, who was my age. We could see him playing soccer in a park from the veranda of her apartment on Des Meurons Street. For as long as I'd

been aware of my grandmère she had always worn black and my mother sometimes called her The Crow, although she had the voice of a pigeon, a soft and lilting coo. "That boy told me he hits the ball with his head," she said. "Does he think I'm crazy?" Earlier she had taken me to the cathedral and put money in a box so that I might light a candle for the soul of my dead sister. Gerald had taken me to my first movie. My young aunt had curled my hair and painted my fingernails and taken me to the meat packing plant where she worked. On the last night of my vacation Grandmère Berthelet said her rosary while we watched *The Untouchables* on television, and then suddenly, all her grown up children arrived to celebrate the end of the work week. The



My father, Joseph Roger Berthelet (Barteltte) is extreme right (back) & my mother Louise Schroeder next to him. My Opa John Schroeder is extreme left (back row) while my Oma is 2nd from left in centre row. The rest of the people are my mother's younger siblings with the exception of two Schroeder aunts at each end of the 2nd row—& my great grandmother.

small living room grew smoky and filled with their laughter and the stories they told in French, and the clink of beer glasses raised in toast after toast. Hours later the party came to an abrupt end when my young aunt came flying into the room crying and in a state of fright, saying that she had just seen the ghost of their father at the end of the hall. That night my grandmère put me to bed on the sofa, and when she turned off the light, the crucifix on the wall turned a glowing green and came forward to hang in the air above me. "Try to have a good sleep," she said in her cooing voice as though she knew that it was more than likely I would not.

A mentor who didn't have much to say.

There was this man, my grandfather, who had very little to say and whose eyes were as blue as mine. I followed him about his yard and garden as he washed dirt from the storm windows he'd scavenged to lay across the frames of seed beds at the side of the house. I squatted beside him in the heat at the end of summer, watching as he tested a watermelon for ripeness and cut into the shafts of gladiolus flowers for me to take home. When he was finished gardening we sat on a bench beside the back steps in silence looking out across what

he had made for himself in a country where he did not feel at home. He would not talk about his other home and in spite of the rumours and stories passed on by my cousins, he remained a tantalizing mystery. When I was an older child and had long since stopped following him about, he once appeared at my bedside in a hospital looking frail and gray with worry, clasping a sodden paper bag filled with freshly washed grapes. And then one day, when I was in my late teens, he summoned me to his bedside to receive a blessing. His touch on my head was light and his voice quavered as he prayed in German, and although I didn't understand what he'd said, I went away with the determination to somehow prove myself.

A day in spring, while reading Maxim Gorky.

I was out on the patio reading Maxim Gorky's novel/memoir, *My Childhood*, when a man invited himself over to chat. Throughout the winter I had read *My Childhood* several times, and now it was a warm spring day and I was savouring Gorky's description of the shore of the Volga River as he saw it upon arriving on a barge at the town of Nizhni-Novgorod, the land looking as though it is embroidered with the golden silk of autumn. His first wistful impression so quickly gives way to the heartrending reality of a harsh world that almost kills him, and I was ever amazed by the cruelty inflicted upon him as a child, and his resilience. During what turned out to be a lengthy conversation with the man who had joined me on the patio, I confessed that I was thinking of taking a creative writing course. He wondered aloud what I might possibly write about. You haven't been anywhere, he said. You haven't done anything. Soon after I began to write, and one of the first stories to come to me was "Flowers For Weddings and Funerals," a story about a child and a grandparent in a garden.

An invitation to speculate.

The invitation by Rhubarb to speculate on what has shaped my life and career is another influence, as it has brought to mind one thing that has led to another, and another. Although I haven't listed ten influences, I am well over a thousand words and so I won't continue. Should I be asked to do the same in another ten years, the list will likely be different, and either longer or shorter, one never knows. **R**

The Mennonite Literary Society declares:

YOU ARE A MENNONITE IF...

...YOU THINK YOU ARE

...YOU WANT TO BE

...YOUR FRIENDS THINK YOU ARE, EVEN IF YOU DON'T

...YOU'RE FIGHTING IT TOOTH-AND-NAIL, BUT CAN'T QUITE SHAKE IT

IF THIS MEANS YOU, PLEASE SEND **RHUBARB** YOUR WORK. THANK YOU.

See Submissions (p. 2) and Coming Up (p. 40) for what's new in **Rhubarb**.

In the Supermarket of a Prairie City

Sean Braun

We traipse our winter boots
through fluorescent aisles
and wonder at starfruit
clustered in the grocer's stand
like the constellations
of another astrology.

We stroke the bellies and fins
of swollen dragonfruit
and pull close that flesh
to inhale its mouth's breath
for any sign of ripe air,
whatever that might be.

I tell you that a banana bunch
is called a hand
and you run the length
of that hand's fingers
with your own,
like a child would a stranger's.

But when you disappear
into the bakery and reappear
with a box of rhubarb pie
you tell me
'If you buy this
I will eat it with you.'

Frozen River

Sean Braun

Still heart
that is like a frozen river
crack and break
and move again.

I am the sun's heat and hammer.

Restless heart
that is like a lonely river
swirl and eddy
plunge and rise.

I am spring's wind and want to tarry.

Thawed heart
that is like a summer river
be still like dawn
at your current's edge.

I am a child that wants to swim.

COMING UP IN **RHUBARB**

#24 THE AMERICAN ISSUE—WINTER 2009

GUEST EDITED BY ANN HOSTETLER

GENERAL SUBMISSIONS ALSO WELCOME.
When submitting work by email, please include
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GROWING UP BAREFOOT

Di Brandt was born Diana Ruth Janzen in Winkler, Manitoba. She was raised in Reinland, a Mennonite village in Southern Manitoba. She left home at the age of 17 and moved to Winnipeg, Manitoba, to attend college. Since then, Brandt has published more than a dozen books of poetry, essays and fiction, and received numerous prizes including the Gerald Lampert Award (for questions i asked my mother), the McNally Robinson Manitoba Book of the Year Award (for Agnes in the sky), the CAA National Poetry Prize (for Jerusalem, beloved) and the Foreword Gold Medal for General Fiction (for Watermelon Syrup: A Novel, with Annie Jacobsen and Jane Finlay-Young). She holds a Canada Research Chair in English and Creative Writing at Brandon University where she recently received the BU Presidential Order of Merit.

di brandt

- growing up barefoot
- Mennonite village life in Reinland, Manitoba, with all its rich array of gardens and fields and cows and pigs and wild yellow plum trees and sun and snow and cousins and babies and work and singing and laughter and family gatherings and aunts and uncles and parents and grandparents, and collectivity and creative play
- having a twin (Rosie) and a kindred spirit-cousin-best friend (Heidi)
- my grandmother Aganetha Zacharias, who raised ten children and dozens of cows and thousands of chickens and lived to be 100, and still had brown hair, who loved beautiful music and laughter and poetry and eloquent speech and delicate china and crocheting and hard hard work and family gatherings
- having two daughters, Lisa and Alison, and raising them on elm-tree lined Jessie Avenue in Winnipeg, next door to Miriam Toews and Cassidy Rempel
- arriving in Winnipeg at the end of the 60s, in the rich ferment of the civil rights and peace movements, marching down Portage Avenue, singing “freedom songs,” listening to Leonard Cohen; and then later finding myself in the midst of the rich flowering of Winnipeg artistic and literary culture in the 80s
- the Winnipeg Folk Festival at Birds Hill Park, which has brought the finest folk musicians in the world to Manitoba, and taught several generations of citizens how to live in peace and harmony and laughter and dancing and music and joy, surrounded by beautiful wild scrub brush (and poison ivy, ouch)



photo by Natalie Schifano

- living on the Nafta Superhighway, on the Windsor-Detroit border, in the heart of industrial car land, for a decade, in the recent past, a whole other life
- travelling as a poet, getting to hang out with other poets and poetry lovers in different cities and countries and cultures around the world: Toronto, Edmonton, Vancouver, St. John's, Halifax, Montreal, Hamilton, Waterloo, Berlin, Edinburgh, Rosslyn (Scotland), London, Leeds, Barcelona, Madrid, Mojácar (Spain), Tokyo, Trier (Germany), Medellín (Colombia), Cali (Colombia), Copenhagen, Maribor (Slovenia), Graz (Austria), Vienna, Geneva, Lavigny (Switzerland), Chicago, Bridgeport (Massachusetts), Minneapolis, Santa Fe, South Carolina, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Gaza, Jerusalem, New York
- English Honours at the University of Manitoba, with many inspirational teachers, such as Victor Cowie, Mike Turner, and Jack Woodbury; and later in graduate school, Northrop Frye and Robert Kroetsch; as well as feminist mentors like Daphne Marlatt, Barbara Godard, Dorothy Livesay, and my lovely colleagues in hiatus, a Winnipeg writing group in the mid-80s: Smaro Kamboureli, Kristjana Gunnars, Jane Casey, Jan Horner, and Pamela Banting

Seeing the world feelingly / like the blind man in my / bones I have come slowly / to this place by the river / long after you...

I was 21 when the floor fell out from under me. I was an English Honours student at the University of Manitoba. I was on the Dean's Honour Roll. I was writing intricately structured and meticulously researched critical essays on *The Faerie Queene* and *Measure for Measure* and *Paradise Lost*. It was a brilliant Honours program, with excellent teaching by devoted professors, who lived and breathed the literary masterpieces they loved. Victor Cowie, Robert Finnegan, Mike Turner, you inspired a whole generation of Manitoba kids, you were fantastic! English was a "core subject" in those days, the early 70s, a prestigious subject, considered the heart of a university undergraduate education. I was trying to become a literary critic. I aspired to be a good critic, a great critic.

"You must always go for the best," my dad used to say, and though he was heartbroken and harsh about my decision to leave the traditional Mennonite ways, I saw myself as nevertheless following his example of tackling big projects with energy and ambition, and also squarely, if presumptuously, and illicitly, in the tradition of my grandfather, Peter Zacharias, a well known church minister and orator, who often performed German poetry in his sermons.

(It helped that it was the early 70s; everyone felt illicit and revolutionary, and the kinds of changes being demanded by students in the universities, for greater student independence and self-direction, was after all familiar to me.)

And there was Jack Woodbury. Professor Woodbury taught Renaissance and Romantic English literature. He was a slight man, with a fierce smile and bright eyes that squinted through strong glasses. He had long sensitive fingers and a proud walk, chest out, a man of deliberation and dignity. He sat at the front of the seminar room, in his brown cardigan and corduroy pants, gripping his coffee cup in his shaking hands, and stared piercingly at us. Then, week after week, read the great masterpieces of English poetry aloud to us in a low calm voice, coiled with intensity. I still hear them in my head just that way, Spenser, Shakespeare, Donne, Herbert, Blake, Shelley, Keats, in his low calm ecstatic voice. And then he would hold forth, he would tell us about the vision, the wildness, the courage, the eroticism, the beauty, the shape shifting magic in the poems, in

graceful swirls of interpretive eloquence.

You see, you see? he would intone, with a wild grin, you see? This wasn't critical reading in the way I'd been taught. Woodbury's lectures didn't lay out theorizable critical strategies for us. This was raw deep poetic engagement, on a level I'd never dreamed of. I was mesmerized. I was transported. It all crumbled around me then, my conscientious undergraduate aspirations, my fistful of A+s, my grade point average. I was transformed. The floor I'd been standing on had a false bottom, it had all been such a game, I fell through, in a great crash, to I didn't know what, I didn't really understand what was happening, though I understand it now, I fell down through my intellect into poetry, das Ding an sich, a call echoing deeply, darkly, at the heart of the nucleus of every cell in my bones.

Toronto poet bpNichol liked to retell, in the experimental 80s, the ancient Hopi myth about the seven creations of the world, each previous incarnation destroyed when one notorious two-legged species forgot to sing its song, throwing the whole ecosystem in jeopardy. He saw poetry as that song, capable of keeping the world in harmony. He understood the harmonizing function of poetry to be literal, physical, energetic, material, not just metaphorical: happening through sound, rhythm, image, resemblance, and resonance, rather than idea. I'm thinking that the new physicists' "string theory," which proposes that the primary building blocks of matter are not atoms and electrons but energetically vibrating "strings," corresponds nicely with this view.

I felt the powerful resonating magic of poetry that way, at age 21, right in the core of me, in Jack Woodbury's classes, and in his office, where I arrived in tears one day, to confess that I didn't know how to write essays any more. I had been sitting in the Elizabeth Dafoe Library in a study carrel for a week, drinking dozens of cups of coffee and agonizing over the opening sentence, which I kept writing and rewriting endlessly. I was wired up. I wanted him to fix my writing block. I wanted advice.

Jack Woodbury looked at me, alarmed, and gesticulated wildly around the room. My life...is falling...in pieces...around me..., he gasped, dramatically, shoving a Kleenex box at me. I'm doing everything wrong. Everyone is coming in here, unable to write. No, no, I thought, looking back at him through my tears, you're doing everything profoundly right, though I can't yet see where it will take us, where it will take me. In any case, there was a paper to write, a deadline to meet. He suggested I wait until classes were over, when I'd have some time to myself. You'll be able to do it then, he surmised—and I took it as a promise—when I'm not here talking to you, hanging over you, watching you every week. And I could, and did.

It took me many years to figure out, floundering among the shards of my broken aspirations, how to put them back together in a way that could answer the deep murky call of poetry in my cells. Your sentences are too long, Woodbury wrote in the margin of one of the essays I wrote for him. (All the essays I wrote, after that, were for him. They became simpler, less clever, much more "by ear," from the blood, the heart, though my sentences are still, everyone tells me, "too long.") The essays were deeper, more allusive, digressive, the sentences circling around the topic at hand, gathering the world in.) A

Another of my professors, Sheldon P. Zitner, of the MA program in English at the University of Toronto, the next year, called me into his office to say, Now listen, I gave your paper an A, then I stroked it out and gave it an F, and then I stroked it out and gave it an A. But I'm just letting you know that I see

what's going on with you, you're really a poet and these essays are trying to be poems. My heart sank: I saw that I was going to have to figure it out. (It might have helped if he'd told me he was writing poems himself, as I found out years later, coming upon his wonderful poetry collection, *Before We Had Words*, in a Toronto bookstore, or perhaps I should have guessed. But probably not. I wasn't ready, then, yet. I had a lot of poetic muscles to develop before I could make the leap.)

Your sentences are too long. You will say they are Persian, but let them be changed. What the hell does that mean, I thought, what does that mean. I carried that margin note around with me, privately, in the secret pocket of my heart, until one day, years later, rereading Shakespeare, I saw, with a start, ah, it's what the weed-crowned Lear tells his imaginary soldiers on the heath, inspecting their too-elaborate iron suits, after he's gone mad, and hears music in the air. Oh, he was our fine mad king all right, Woodbury was, racked with some deep heartbreak I recognized but didn't understand, our eloquent greatly beloved wild prairie king of poetry. It was a fine great honour to be in your exotically suited imaginary troops, Jack Woodbury, wandering about on your wild flowered visionary heath, trying on new clothes, new weeds. Seeing the world feelingly, its fearful symmetries, its starry dimensions, its sensitive plants, mysterious wheels of fire, celestial music in the air, it's what you taught us, it's what you did. **R**

Song of Home

Sean Braun

When I bend low
on the steps of my porch
and call you home
with a song that whispers—
like a voice slipping into dream
or the wind that blows across snow
and covers your tracks
so that when you turn
you find no footprints behind you—
you'll know that home
is in the calling.

Fingerprints

Sean Braun

For now,
my fingerprints remain
on your books
and on your breast
as your fingerprints persist
on this
love's death.

Until dust
and new love's fingerprints
shroud beautiful
before's bareness
and old love's fingerprints
disappear
and evanesce.

INFLUENCE & IMPACT

Patrick Friesen was born in Steinbach, Manitoba, was a resident of Winnipeg for thirty years, and now lives in Vancouver. He has worked as a teacher, film-maker, radio writer and producer, and taxi cab driver. Friesen has published numerous books of poetry and also collaborated with choreographers, dancers, musicians and composers. He tours on a regular basis, giving readings and workshops all over the country. His book, *A Broken Bowl*, was a finalist for the 1997 Governor-General's Award. Along with a dozen books of poetry and a book of essays, Patrick Friesen has released two CDs with pianist Marilyn Lerner. Friesen has also co-translated, with P. K. Brask, four books of Danish poetry. His most recent book was *Earth's Crude Gravities* (Harbour, 2007).

Patrick Friesen

To write of influences in one's life and work is to make arbitrary selections; the whole story can't, of course, be told. This is a gathering of selections made within the limits and fictions of memory. The idea, I suppose, is to weave a kind of rough tapestry with a lot of threads missing; a tapestry that offers a ghost scene of influence and impact. So, I leave out family, friends and teachers, for example; I leave out weather and terrain, and turn toward books and music, toward other arts.

Perhaps music came first, the sounds of my parents singing, or my mother playing "Träumerei" on the piano. That memory sits deep. Hymns, always, but also English and Irish ballads; my mother named me after "The Ballad of Sir Patrick Spens." The cadences of the King James Bible read aloud in church, or at home during family devotions, made a deep impact. A musical impact, the sound of the human voice riding old rhythms and forms.

Rock 'n' roll hit with hurricane force as I entered my teen years, but especially when I was 17, and the British Invasion arrived. There was an unfettered joy in that music, a release from the pressures of expected religious and civic behavior. It was the vehicle I had been looking for. I had to get out of where I was and, though I didn't physically leave for another two years, I left spiritually.

When alone in the house, I cranked the music and danced like a wild man. It was the magnificence of the Beatle harmonies and the urgency of John Lennon's vocals that broke through all the crap, the layers of "should" and "must" and the shallow layers of "niceness" in the community. Songs like "Rain" or "Hey Bulldog"—well, I'm on my feet and free. Necessity.

A little later it was the ancient voices of The Band, particularly the keening voice of Richard Manuel. "I Shall Be Released," "Whispering Pines," or a dozen others. Aside from voice, I learned how to trust an off-hand lyrical musicality rather than strict metre or unmusical free verse. With Dylan, especially in his astonishing album *Blonde on Blonde*, I learned a lot about imagery, word



Jonah and Patrick

photo by Marijke Friesen

imagery attached to music. Jazz pianist Bill Evans showed me the long sustained improvisational line, which I worked at developing in language. For me, this long line interwove with the cadences of both the King James Bible and Kerouac's *On the Road*. Language and music—it's impossible to separate them sometimes.

And there are other musical influences, ranging all over the map. I loved the derangement you could find in rock 'n' roll; The Fendermen, for example, crazing their way through "Mule Skinner Blues," or The Trashmen creating mayhem with "Surfin' Bird." Everything out of kilter. This, too, was influential, as were various pieces of classical music, like Mozart's "Ave verum," or his violin sonatas, and jazz numbers like Bill Evans' "Peace Piece." Fado and cante jondo were later influences. Lucília do Carmo singing "Maria Madalena," for example, or a band like Grupo Gitano Del Sacromonte doing almost anything.



Somewhere in Southeastern Manitoba; photo by Kevin Friesen

Books, words? Reading was a natural act, and I always had a rolled up paperback in my back pocket. In high school, Eustacia Vye, in Hardy's *The Return of the Native*, had an enormous impact. She was a darkly attractive woman to a teenaged boy entering puberty and the freedom of thought. Eustacia Vye longed for another place, another way of life. I identified with her intellectual yearning and her passion for the possible life.

Stephen Daedalus, in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, was influential. I had read the book as a teenager, but then I encountered it more fully when I sat in on a few of John Moriarty's English classes at

the University of Manitoba. He spoke without notes, bringing Joyce alive with his spiritual fire and Irish musicality. Stephen's survival of the priest and his sermon about hell, and especially his moment of epiphany as he stares at the girl standing in the stream holding up her skirt, these were powerful moments. His recognition that he would leave the church behind and be an artist, would shape his life with words gathered from the world, this spoke to me. I'd say it helped focus me. Among the many influential books, these two, *Portrait* and *The Return*, were basic.

But how can I stop there? The snow storm at the ending of "The Dead" by Joyce; Traherne, Blake, Akhmatova, Tsvetaeva, D. H. Lawrence, Dylan Thomas, *The Dynamics of Faith*, *Black Spring*, *The Time Falling Bodies Take to Light*, *Duino Elegies*, Meister Eckhart, and so on. The same eye through which God sees me is the eye through which I see God. That's a paraphrase of Eckhart, one of the most important things I've ever read. Some days I think I understand it. I loved jumping the rails when I found Lorca. Not quite derangement, but a "leaping poetry," as Bly called it. For me it was another way of breaking out of conditioning, of rote thinking.

In movies, Irene Pappas in *Zorba the Greek*, that dark-kerchiefed smoldering passion, a Greek Eustacia Vye. Ava Gardner in John Huston's film adaptation of Tennessee Williams' *The Night of the Iguana*. With her raucous cynicism, her seam of pain and vulnerability, and her deep resilience, Gardner transcended the original stage character. And Deborah Kerr's character, Hannah, saying, "nothing human disgusts me," that stayed with me. In visual art, there was Giacometti's life and work. In dance, Nijinsky's diaries, and Margie Gillis translating Molly Bloom's monologue into physical reality. Yes.

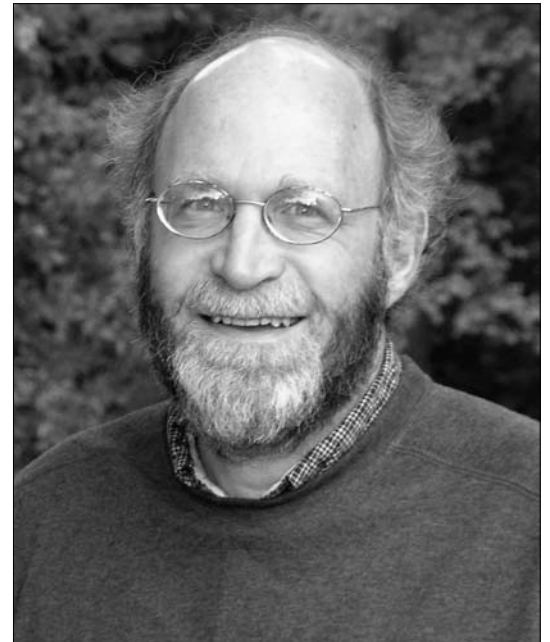
Absolutely influential, all of them, the people, the works. Passion, flaw, and endurance, this is always what matters. The flaw in a person or a work, not the perfection. We have nothing but time, and we have almost no time, but we have the work of hands, tongues, and minds, the darkness they illuminate, and the lights they shoot out. **R**

THE RIGHT ATTENTION

Jeff Gundy has taught at Bluffton University since 1984. He is the author of two collections of nonfiction prose. In *A Community of Memory: My Days with George and Clara* (Illinois), the many voices of Jeff Gundy's Amish and Mennonite forebears trace their paths and chronicle their lives in a series of narratives. Women and men speak in these pages, telling their stories and linking themselves to each other, the past, and the present. Gundy demonstrates that who he is—who we all are—is shaped by a past peopled with those who worked, loved, dreamed, and died. He also wrote *Scattering Point: The World in a Mennonite Eye* (SUNY), as well as three previous books of poetry: *Rhapsody with Dark Matter* (Bottom Dog) *Flatlands* (Cleveland State) and *Inquiries* (Bottom Dog). He has published four full-length collections of poetry, most recently *Deerflies*, which won the Editions Prize and the Nancy Dasher Award. Other new work is in *Kenyon Review*, *Georgia Review*, and *Christian Century*. His three prose books include the award-winning *Walker in the Fog: On Mennonite Writing*. Recipient of several Ohio Arts Council fellowships, Gundy is a 2008 Fulbright Lecturer at the University of Salzburg, Austria.

Jeff Gundy

- William Stafford, poet and pacifist
- the acoustic guitar, and songs written for it
- the Mennonite church (volumes of commentary left unspoken here)
- the Illinois prairie
- the sixties/wars and rumors of wars/visions of peace, acts toward peace
- the English language and the international language of poetry
- Nick Lindsay, my first poetic mentor at Goshen College
- feminist Menno poets: Julia Spicher Kasdorf, Jean Janzen, Di Brandt
- extravagant 19th-century poet/misfits: Blake, Thoreau, Emerson, Whitman, Dickinson
- the struggle between reason and imagination, Apollo and Dionysius, the instrumental and the ecstatic, the practical and the mystical, narrative and lyric, (dare I say) prose and poetry



Any list like this must be arbitrary, eccentric, even delusional. Who can say, really? So much is hidden. And what is “nearest and dearest” might depend on what day it is, what hour. But I’m just back from a symposium on Stafford, so he’s in my mind again: as an enormously, sneakily inventive and oddly explosive poet (the incongruity of “explosive” for maybe the most persistently, rigorously pacifist American poet is deliberate), as an innovative and influential teacher (slogans like “no praise, no blame” and “writing is one of the great, free human acts” still guide my practice, however imperfectly I follow them), as a human being whose life was forever transformed by his four years in CPS camps during World War II.

Stafford recognized by the end of that time the fundamental divide between those people willing to kill for the state and the remnant who resisted. He spent the rest of his life in a persistent, complicated, and subtle effort to construct the

sort of witness that would neither compromise his claims out of existence nor merely alienate his opponents.

This struggle to be radical and yet in conversation with those who differ still seems to me both crucial and quite difficult. I fail at it every day; especially, I fail at treating my adversaries and opponents with the grace and courtesy that I wish they would show towards me. (Of course, some don't show any noticeable grace and courtesy towards people like me, which makes things even more difficult.)

Still. Ordinary human reciprocity is a joy and a privilege, and I have been lucky enough to make many friends and feel warm connections with many others scattered all over North America and beyond. But those warm feelings, precious as they are, come relatively easily. It's easy to love the people who treat you well and love you back.


What to do with the rest? That's much harder. What shocked Stafford during the war, so deeply that it marked him all the rest of his life, was the sudden, intense hostility directed at him when he refused to join into the general patriotism and militarism of his time—even by many he had considered friends and fellow travelers.

Although we have somehow avoided slipping into another such massive conflagration, in other ways the world has not changed all that much. After 9/11, the U.S. was swept into a wave of fearful nationalism that probably had not been equaled since Pearl Harbor. (Even the atomic fears of the Cold War days were more diffuse, or so it seems to me.) I remember speaking with a fellow soccer parent at a game a few days later. "Well, one thing you can say about times like these is that they bring us together as a country," he said, a little wistfully it seemed. "Yes, but together to do what?" I asked. He had no answer then, and neither did I; neither of us was quite enough at ease, there in the bleachers, to say all that we were thinking. But of course by now we know what would follow: first Afghanistan, then Iraq, and all the pernicious hatred and violence of the "war on terror."

During the grim years when the fear was strongest it was common to hear, from prominent commentators, that anyone who did not support every imaginable violence against those we had named as enemies was simply a traitor. Some people, notably a former vice-president whose name will not be written here, are still saying such things. (Those of us who doubted this rhetoric were right, as we all know now, and those who claimed that the war was just and necessary and would settle things quickly were wrong. How much comfort is to be taken from that?) I must admit that I did not say as much as I wanted to during those times, though I attended some marches and meetings and wrote some letters. Plainly, again, this war was not going to be stopped, even when a million or so of us gathered in squares and on streets to object. But sometimes the effort is all that we have.

Stafford had no solution to the problem of changing the world, except to live each day toward peace, as best he could. We know now that it is not just militarism that must be resisted if life on this planet is to flourish; we need to transform our whole way of living and relating, not only to each other but to the rest of the natural order as well.

But the readers of *Rhubarb* don't need to be told such things. Our problem, always, is not really knowledge of the problems. It's imagination of the path forward, and the strength and craft to follow it. Mere reason is not going to suffice, and that's why my list is so heavy with art and music.

I realize now that I left out the natural world almost entirely, which seems shocking. At the end of his poem "Vocation," Stafford writes, "Your job is to find what the world is trying to be." Those Illinois prairies—Stafford grew up in Kansas, just a little west, a little earlier, and a little drier—teach about space and weather and the need to line ourselves up with the forces that are larger than we are, but only if we pay the right sort of attention. 

GOOD ART, GOOD RELIGION

Julia Spicher Kasdorf was born in Lewistown, Pennsylvania, and grew up in the suburbssoutheastofPittsburghnearIrwin,WestmorelandCounty.Herparents were Mennonites who chose to leave their rural community in central Pennsylvania for the city. She is associate professor of English and Women’s Studies at Pennsylvania State University, has published two books of poetry and two books of non-fiction. *The Body and the Book: Writing from a Mennonite Life* has just been reprinted in paperback by Penn State Press. Most recently, she co-edited a poetry anthology, *Broken Land: Poems of Brooklyn*, and a new edition of J. W. Yoder’s *Rosanna of the Amish*. She has received a Pushcart Prize and a 2009 National Endowment for the Arts fellowship in literature.

Julia Spicher Kasdorf

Ten Personally Meaningful Things in Roughly Chronological Order

10. Laura Ingalls Wilder: *Little House in the Big Woods*, *Little House on the Prairie*, *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, etc. Mom read these books to my brother and me before I could read them myself. They depicted people and locations in ways that transformed the past into another place you could visit by way of reading or writing. The domestic tasks on the frontier—hog butchering, making apple butter—were things my mother recalled from her own childhood on the farm, and so those ordinary, every day events of life and work seemed not so distant, but somehow our own and yet also fit subjects for literature.

9. Antoine de Saint-Exupery: *The Little Prince / Le Petit Prince* “It is only with the heart that one sees rightly, what is essential is invisible to the eye,” the fox tells the Prince, according to my memory. And elsewhere: “It was useful because it was beautiful.” I desperately needed his sort of sentimental advice, growing up as I was in a household where a common question was, “Is that necessary?”

I read this book first in English class, grade 7, then again in French, grade 9. Craving beauty, I copied quotations in both languages and carefully wrote them out in calligraphy, then traced the illustrations and tinted them with watercolors. The author’s line drawings matched the balance of simplicity and profundity that the novella held. It resonated for me like a parable of Jesus, only longer and more complex. I was intrigued by what I knew of the author’s life—airplane pilot, downed in the desert of North Africa on his way to Saigon and rescued by a nomad—though I would not fly on an airplane until my senior year of high school.

8. Theodore Roethke—“the greenhouse poems,” which constitute the first section of his second book, *The Lost Son*

Written from Roethke’s memories of a childhood dominated by his German immigrant family’s greenhouse business, this series depicts growth as a painful struggle, but also portrays the fierce, irrepressible resiliency of plants. (See #1.) The language is emotionally intense yet vividly concrete. As a teenager, I



first discovered the work at the Pennsylvania Governor's School for the arts, where I studied with Deborah Burnham, a poet then writing a dissertation on Roethke's notebooks.

7. Harold and Maude (1971)

Harold: Maude?

Maude: Hmm?

Harold: Do you pray?

Maude: Pray? No. I communicate.

Harold: With God?

Maude: With Life.

This brilliant film and the soundtrack by Cat Stevens (now Yusuf Islam) are the first works of popular culture to really move and influence me—up to that point, it was mostly hymns and books from church and school. I loved the audacity of Maude's defiance and passion for a life, even as she anticipated her own death. (See #1.) "If you want to Sing Out, Sing Out," composed especially for the film, was my manifesto, expressing possibility, irreverence, and exuberance.

6. Harold S. Bender: The Anabaptist Vision

No joke.

On my bookshelf remains the slim, purple paperback with marginal notes and underlining from my first or second year at Goshen College. It may not be the text so much as the cultural memory that followed it and influenced me so profoundly growing up: the 1970s lectures and slide shows on Anabaptist history; the camp cabins at Laurelville called Amsterdam, Bern, and Zurich; the familiar portraits of radicals Blaurock, Grebel, and Manz in gorgeous velvet frocks. My parents' sense of sectarian separation—plain dress, life in traditional farm enclaves—replaced in one generation by an ideology that defined the true church along the lines of community, discipleship, and non-resistance. Maybe Bender's construction of the Swiss Brethren ethos is more a Foucaultian genealogy than hard history, but it richly served my imagination.

5. Madeline L'Engle: Walking on Water

Good art can be good religion, I learned from this book, but bad art is just bad art. Weirdly, I found it in the English language section of the Sichuan Teacher's College Library while I was on a Study Service Trimester from Goshen College in Chengdu, People's Republic of China, in 1982. Here, for the first time, I heard someone say that making real art—and not just "work for the church"—might constitute faithfulness, that a theology of incarnation calls for creative work in the world, and that poor or didactic work is unworthy.

4. Liquid Sky (1982)

"I was taught that my prince would come and I would have his children... and on the weekends we would barbecue... and all the other princes and their princesses would come and they would say 'delicious delicious...' Oh how boring..." drones Margaret, the fashion model/heroin-addict in one of the film's most memorable scenes. Why did this very strange sci-fi midnight movie make me weep? I didn't know so I just kept seeing it again and again. Now, I think it worked like a dream, expressing the atmosphere of the early 1980s in lower Manhattan—near to a name for AIDS, a wild and productive arts scene, drugs in public, everything on the verge of gentrification and extinction. Even Menno House (a Mennonite boarding establishment) could not insulate an undergraduate yearning for signs of life outside the domestic and religious scripts she was raised to follow.

3. H.D: Sea Garden

At NYU, I wrote an undergraduate honors thesis on this first, Imagist book by H.D., a Moravian poet from Pennsylvania who ran off to London engaged to Ezra Pound. I was and continue to be as much taken with her biography as her rigorous aesthetics; her insistence on the significance of coincidence; her commitment to history, archetype, and myth; her experience of trauma and desire for peace in the midst of world wars; and her relentless devotion to art.

2. Walter Ong: Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word

Of all the books I read in graduate school, this was most important in helping me to make the connections I desperately needed to find between fragmented elements of my life, including an Amish-Mennonite ethos at home growing up, church, poetry, university life, etc. It helped me to understand why my first book was so hard for my relatives to read, and it helped me to mediate the experiences of J. W. Yoder, subject of my dissertation. Also, at this time I found solace in Trinh T. Mihn-ha's Woman, Native, Other; M. M. Bakhtin's Art and Answerability; and Judith Herman's Trauma and Recovery.

1. Grace M. Jantzen: Becoming Divine, Foundations of Violence, Violence to Eternity, etc.

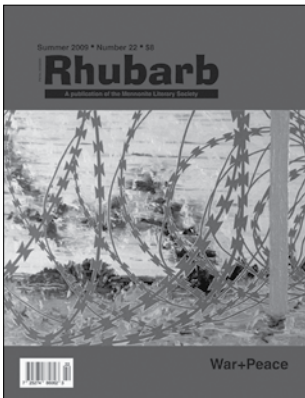
Here is my intellectual fairy godmother of the moment! Although this scholar died a Quaker in the Lake District of England, she grew up in some sort of Mennonite village in northern Saskatchewan. Her work in the philosophy of religion strikes me as profound and deeply Mennonite/agrarian because she insists on justice for all living things; on incarnation and the creation of the dominion of God here, now; on flourishing; on refusing the death-dealing ethic of Western culture and embracing "natality," (a term from Hannah Arendt), thriving, and beauty. More than once, Jantzen has rescued me from despair and restored hope in my work. **R**

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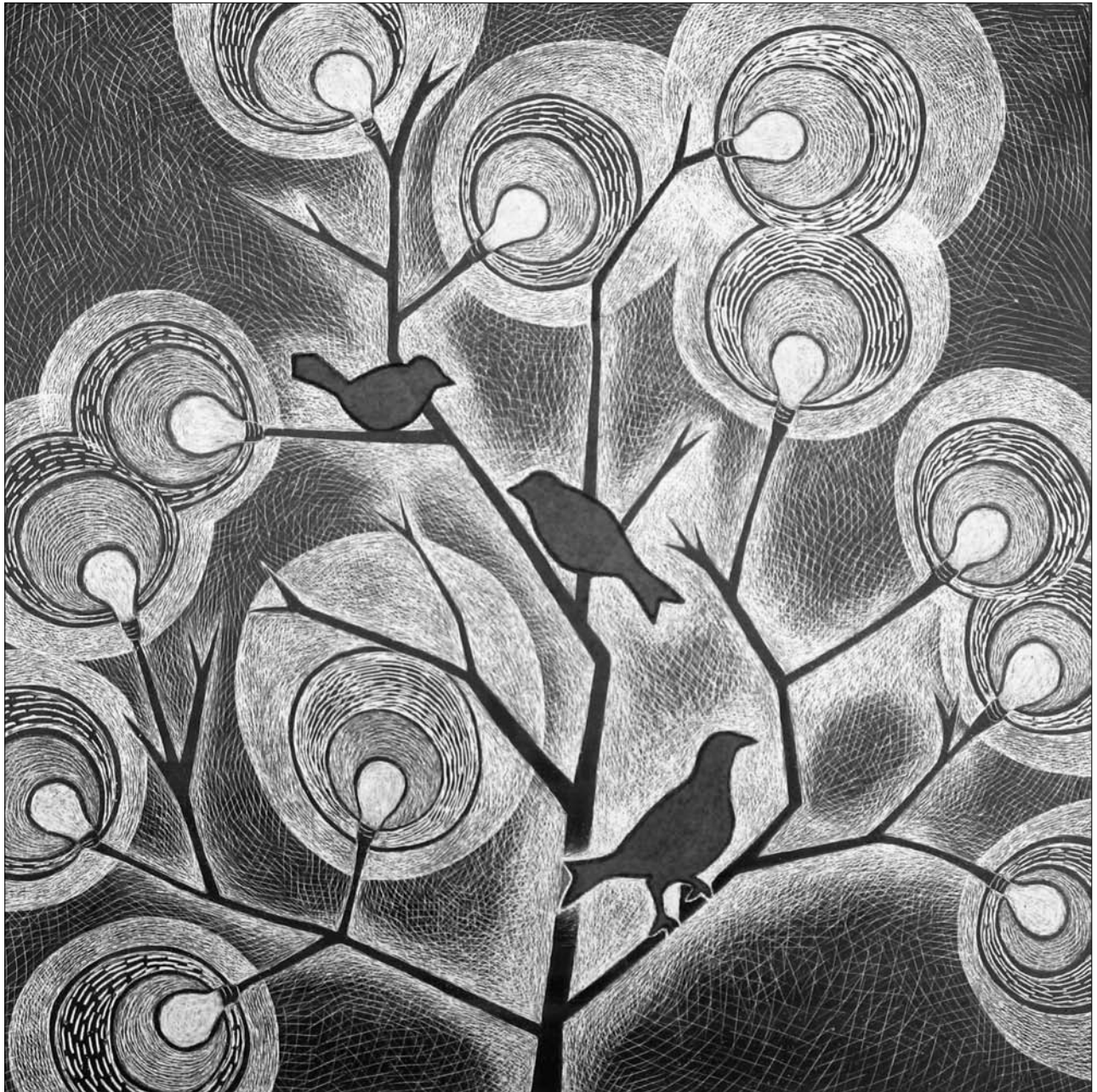
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Five pieces by Lora Jost

Three Red Birds (above)

Homeland Security (page 26, top right)

January (page 26, top left)

The Drought (page 26, bottom right)

The Hypnotist (page 26, bottom left)

See originals full colour at http://www.lawrenceartscenter.com/Artists/Lora_Jost/index.html

ABLAZE IN BEAUTY

Wanda Koop is one of Canada's most distinguished artists. Her painting career spans three decades and includes over fifty solo exhibitions. Her work is included in numerous international private and museum collections including the National Gallery of Canada, which, together with the Winnipeg Art Gallery, is currently preparing a major exhibition. She is the recipient of numerous awards, including Doctors of Letters from the University of Winnipeg, and the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design, as well as a Doctor of Laws from the University of Manitoba. She is a Member of the Order of Canada, and founder of Art City, an inner city art centre in Winnipeg.

Wanda Koop

Many poets use allegories, couplets, and similes to help convey an image, a story, a feeling. Wanda Koop uses tricks of a different guise, but is a poet nonetheless. Colour, form, light, and scale are just some of the means by which Wanda constructs meaning out of our complicated world—a world which Wanda describes as being “ablaze—in all its beauty and in its horror.”

But first, let us begin with a story: As a child living in northeast Winnipeg, Wanda would spend her summers reveling in the humble little garden her parents built. In this garden, beneath booming hydro power-lines and surrounded by fields of weeds and wild grasses, an eight-year-old Wanda found a perfect little purple leaf poking through the worn and musty soil.

Unapologetic in its beauty, the purple leaf glowed, and not a day went by that Wanda didn't go out to the garden to admire it. Wanda took more and more delight in the plant as the summer passed. She watched as it rose higher, admiring the brilliance of its leaves, and fell for its tiny flowers. The plant shimmered—both in the sun and in its glory.

Back at school in September, Wanda's class was asked to bring in an object from the summer for show-and-tell and naturally, the purple plant came to mind. Wanda was thrilled that her teacher and friends would be able to experience her plant in the way that she had.

When show-and-tell day came, Wanda went to the garden and, after much effort, managed to pull the plant out from the ground. Lugging her now life-sized prize, she eventually arrived at school, a trail of purple leaves fading behind her. Her pride for the plant and the excitement about showing it off drove her down the school's halls until she reached her classroom door. It was then that her teacher suddenly stopped her. “What are you doing, dragging a weed in here with all that dirt?” The class burst out in laughter. Wanda was struck with horror.

This wasn't a weed. To Wanda, it was everything.

Her opinion didn't seem to matter though, as her purple plant made it's way to the garbage can, left to wilt, left to die. Wanda walked to her desk—absolutely broken—and began to cry.

Wanda had already been painting and drawing for many years, but it was at this moment that Wanda became an artist. It was here that Wanda realized that it wasn't that the plant was not beautiful, magnificent even; it was just that the



photo by Bruce Spielman

others could not see it in the way that she did or could. Had she been able to paint the plant as she'd seen it, the others may have also found their own beauty in it. From that moment onward, art became the voice with which Wanda could project her view of the world. She has become consumed with the need to communicate this, that it becomes the driving force behind all of her works.

Much like how Wanda turned the demise of her plant into something proactive, she also chooses to take a positive outlook through her art. Paintings founded upon even the darkest and most difficult subject matter of loss and war are balanced by the standpoint with which Wanda views them. In her Green Zone images of the Iraq War, Wanda refuses to project the death and despair normally coupled with war. When art critic and writer Robert Enright asked Wanda if she or her images are meant to be critical of the war, her response was unexpected but powerful:

"It's more about being alive and countering war with art and culture. It may be naïve, but as I've said, I do think art is the opposite of war. So I'm not letting this war use me up, take the best part of me and make me frightened. I want my work to be life-affirming, so I'm using the war to reclaim experience."¹

Wanda continues to reinforce life on a local level through Winnipeg's Art City, a quality drop-in art centre she founded in Winnipeg's West Broadway neighborhood. It is a place where everyone is given the opportunity to discover and experience the power of art, a place where people can find their own voice through visual language.

The beauty of art is that it is democratic—it is not overt in its message and does not force anyone to feel a certain way. It can provoke its viewers, challenging them to be open, to ask questions, without being too literal. Wanda has built a career, a life, bringing people to art and art to people. She has been persistent in her goal of getting people to look at her work in their own way—through their own voice. Wanda keeps finding the purple plant in the unconventional garden. She paints it, photographs it, films it, and invites people in to revel in its quiet power.

The story of Wanda and her purple plant could have ended differently. Many eight-year-olds would have left the story with a heartbreak and the plant in the garbage can, but Wanda wasn't like most eight-year-olds. Wanda's story leads to a powerful voice in the world, to art, to hope, to life.

¹ Enright, Robert, "The Palette of Collected Knowledge: Wanda Koop's Green Zone", Green Zone. Winnipeg: City Press. Wanda Koop, 2008.

Written by Tanya Peters and based on a conversation with Wanda Koop at her studio on Monday, August 24th, 2009. **R**

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A LESS BIBLICAL ENDING

Andreas Schroeder is a German-born Canadian poet, novelist, and nonfiction writer who lives in British Columbia. For many years he appeared on the CBC radio show *Basic Black* as its “resident crookologist,” presenting a segment on some of the world’s most outrageous and humorous crimes and criminals. He has served a term as Chair of the Writers’ Union of Canada (1976/77), at which time he took over the Union’s crusade for Public Lending Right. Schroeder teaches Creative Non-Fiction in the University of British Columbia’s Creative Writing program. Schroeder was short-listed for a Governor-General’s Award (Nonfiction: *Shaking It Rough*) in 1977. He has received several National Magazine Awards, and the Canadian Association of Journalists’ “Best Investigative Journalism” award in 1990.

Andreas Schroeder

- Mennonite culture & theology
- literature, especially the writing of Günter Grass, Franz Kafka, Dennis Lee, Robert Bringhurst, William Gass)
- the sixties
- prison
- motorcycling
- various teachers
- my father
- my wife Sharon

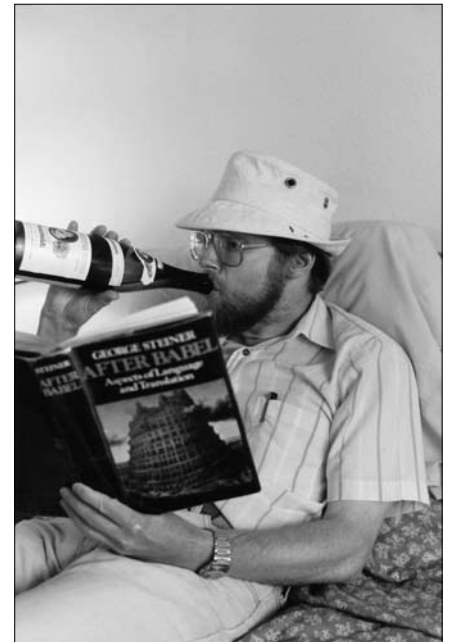
While literature in general—both reading it and committing it—has had a profound impact on my life, and continues to be my central preoccupation, I’ve never been entirely certain whether it’s the cause, the effect, or even just a side-effect of what motivates me. And like questions about the existence of God, I’ve never felt any great need to pin down a definitive answer.

I can say this much: the circumstance that most determined my life’s direction was being born into a family and a religious culture that, for all its positive attributes (and there are many), was sharply at odds with both my nature and my aptitudes.

And while it didn’t dawn on me until my upper teens, I came to see this as a very positive and productive condition.

For one thing, it provided no places to hide. For every important question there were at least two strongly conflicting perspectives: the Mennonite explanation, and the secular vision of the Sixties. Ethics, morality, religion, relationships, politics—I remember feeling sorry for many of my non-Mennonite friends who had so few yardsticks for comparison.

At my age, back then, the Mennonite perspective was admittedly at a distinct disadvantage. To me it was a known quantity, highly restricting, largely inflexible, and contaminated by the inevitable hypocrisies that any institution will accumulate over time. By comparison, the secular view was new, full of sparkling possibilities, not least the chance to road-test alternatives to a long list of ideas I’d always found suspect. That isolationism was conducive to spiritual growth.



At Ashland

That the Bible was the true record of the mind of God. That gender orientation was a lifestyle choice. That the church's interpretation of Paul's letter to the Corinthians was any way to run a railroad.

The attraction of the Sixties was that you could debate all these issues and then actually try them out. It's become fashionable nowadays to dump on that era, but for a young Mennonite struggling to understand the intricacies of, say, sexual relationships—something that within the Mennonite community was really only possible after marriage—it was an extraordinarily liberating time. People forget how anthropoidal the Fifties were. Young females stood around in groups preening and giggling, while young males stood around in gangs, fighting and smashing beer cans against their foreheads. (Mennonite

youth mostly eschewed the beer cans and the fighting, but the results seemed no more enlightening.) You couldn't get a decent conversation going between the sexes to save your soul.

For me, the Sixties constituted a rare kind of social glasnost, when otherness or oddness or just a general lack of savoir faire didn't automatically turn one into a pariah. Coming, as I did, out of a closed community, with very little understanding of how to navigate "English" secular society, this was a godsend. There's little practical difference between reinventing the world and simply discovering it; the youth of the Sixties were attempting the former, I the latter. Mostly,

the two dovetailed remarkably well.

Communes. Drugs. Multiple relationships. Pacifism. Civil Rights. Gender equality. Subsistence economics. There was an openness to alternative ideas, an enthusiastic, even reckless willingness to try new ways of organizing society, of conducting business, of living together, that produced a quality of inquisitiveness and optimism no subsequent generation has been able to match. It doesn't matter that this experiment eventually failed—at least as public policy—or even that the people who destroyed it were often the same people who initially created it. I remember it as a time when there was an awful lot more oxygen in the air than there is today, and I wouldn't have missed it for the world.

What has always remained intriguing to me is how differently my father and I adjudged the end result. From his perspective, my life was an unmitigated disaster—a son who had concluded that religion was largely a sophisticated form of crowd control, did drugs, went to prison, lived in sin, produced children without the sanction of marriage, and traded his salvation for a life of writing books. A classic case of the Prodigal Son—minus the biblical ending.

I, needless to say, experienced those same events very differently. Each one proved fascinating; each opened vast new territories. Writing financed all kinds of adventure and gave me a second run at almost everything important that happened to me. Motorcycling was exhilarating, and rigorous in its demand for precision. Prison taught me how to listen more accurately, and how to write dialogue. I credit all my relationships with finally teaching me what it's taken to maintain a wonderful partnership with my wife Sharon for the past 35 years.

In a sense, the joke has been on both of us. According to my father's expectations, The Sixties should have turned me into a lost and sorry soul, blinded



Sabrina & Andreas, Aug 1991

by false teachings; an object lesson in recidivism and apostasy. According to mine, I (and 50 million of my closest friends) should have managed to rein in Wall and Bay Street, expand civil rights, shrink the military-industrial complex, and ditch The Bomb. Plus, I'd planned to make a successful living as a writer in the process.

Only a few of those things happened, of course—and as for me, despite my father's doomsday pessimism and my equally stubborn optimism, all that Sturm und Drang merely produced a fairly ordinary person who pays his bills on time, replaces the toilet roll when it's empty, and obeys most of the laws of the land most of the time. And makes a living as a writer. That part, at least, worked out.

Historians will tell you that even progressive eras rarely turn out to have pioneered more than one or two genuinely new ideas. I suspect this is true for the Sixties—and perhaps for the Mennonites, too. In fact it could be argued that neither actually pioneered any truly new ideas—just a handful of Golden Oldies that the world keeps forgetting and has to re-discover over and over again. And the more I've thought about it over the years, the more I've come to suspect that that may be about as good as it gets. **R**

Savoury Black Pepper **Rhubarb** with a Poached Duck Egg

by Paul Rankin

For the **rhubarb**:

50g/1¾oz butter
pinch salt
½ lemon, juice only
4 sticks **rhubarb**, chopped
5 fresh sage leaves
freshly ground black pepper

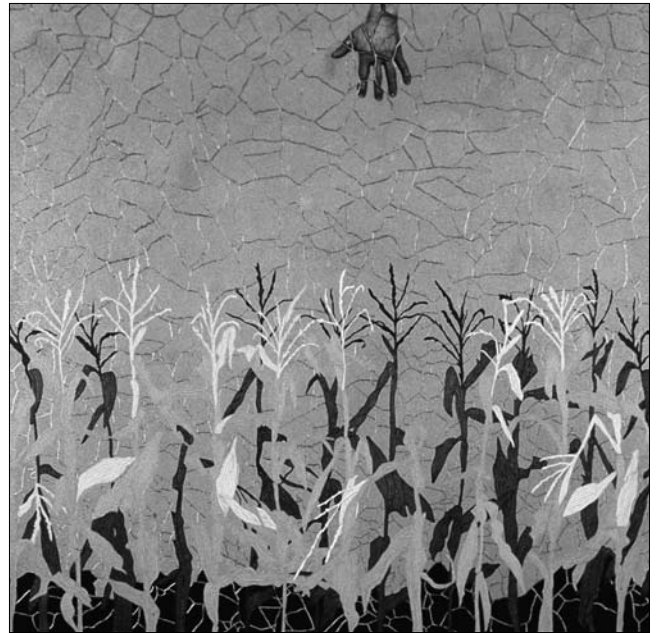
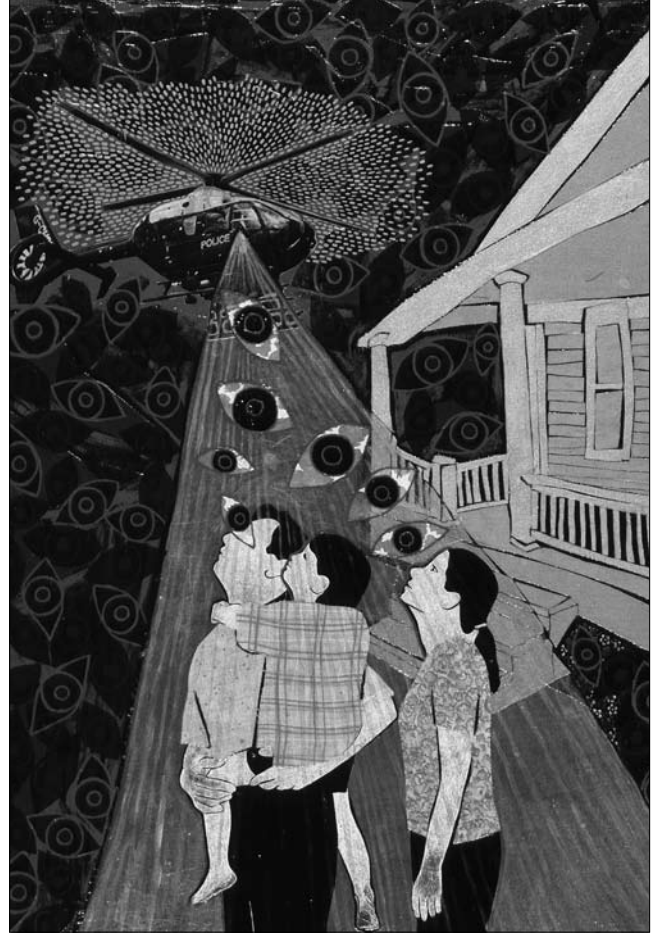
For the poached duck egg:

1 tsp white wine vinegar
1 duck egg

Method

1. For the **rhubarb**, heat the butter, salt and lemon juice together in a frying pan. Add the **rhubarb**, sage and black pepper and cook over a gentle heat for eight minutes, or until the **rhubarb** has softened.
2. To poach the duck egg, fill a small saucepan with water, add the vinegar and bring to a gentle boil, swirling the water round to make a whirlpool.
3. Crack the egg into the middle of the water and leave to cook for four minutes, or until the egg white has set. Remove with a slotted spoon.
4. To serve, spoon the **rhubarb** onto a serving plate and top with the poached egg.

Serves 1.



MY TAPEWORM, MY GURU

David Waltner-Toews was born in Winnipeg, but his education and career have taken him to many parts of the world. He is a Canadian epidemiologist, essayist, poet, fiction writer, veterinarian, and a specialist in the epidemiology of food and waterborne diseases, zoonoses and ecosystem health. A professor in the Department of Population Medicine at the University of Guelph, he is the founding president of Veterinarians without Borders/Vétérinaires sans Frontières, and founding president of the Network for Ecosystem Sustainability and Health. Besides scholarly papers and a textbook, he has published half a dozen books of poetry, a collection of poems and recipes, an award-winning collection of short stories (*One Foot in Heaven*), a murder mystery (*Fear of Landing*) and a book about the natural history of diseases people get from animals (*The Chickens Fight Back: Pandemic Panics and Deadly Diseases that Jump from Animals to Humans*).

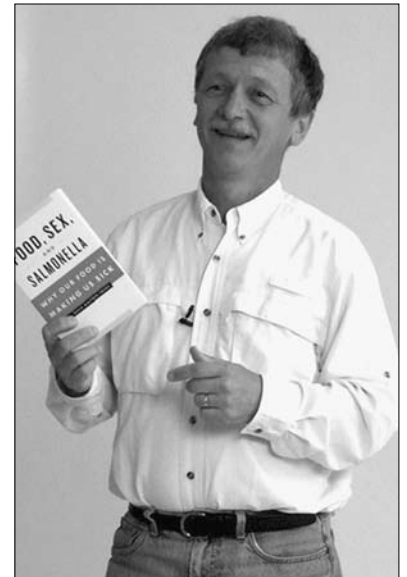
David Waltner-Toews

— my mother, who told my siblings that my bad, spoiled behaviour was because I was “artistic.” Also, while my dad set down the law, my mother interpreted it—a wise judge! And in a family of historians, made room for another kind of narrative, more complex, ambiguous, and real than the official histories that surrounded me and tried to define me.

— Glenn Gould playing Bach’s Piano Concerto Number 5 in F Minor; Beethoven’s Piano Concerto 1 in C major; Goldberg Variations. I had an album with Gould playing the Bach and Beethoven concertos that I listened to in the 1960s. Then when I travelled overland across Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, I hummed the pieces to myself. The second movement of the Bach piece was the theme for the movie *Slaughterhouse Five*, based on one of my favourite novels by an atheist who was really, although he didn’t know it, a closet Mennonite. All through the writing of my first novel, *Fear of Landing*, I listened to Gould (both the young and the old) playing the Goldberg Variations, which explains a lot of its contrapuntal structure.

— running out of money in Calcutta: *Song Offerings* by Rabindranath Tagore, with a preface by WB Yeats. (See accompanying essay.)

— Goshen College: Mary Bender’s course on twentieth century fiction (She leaned over the podium at 8:30 in the morning, explaining Sartre, Camus, Robbes-Grillet, and said to us—to me: “They have defined the problem. Now you must find a solution.” That has defined both what I have written and what I still must write); Mary Oyer’s courses on History of Western Culture, History of Music, and African Arts. Both these amazing professors taught me by example that it was possible to question everything, engage everywhere—and still be a Mennonite. This was profound heresy according to my M.B. Winnipeg upbringing. The third of these courses I didn’t take, but Kathy did, and introduced me to “*Song of Lawino*” by Okot p’Bitek—this was the inspiration for the voice and structure of my Tante Tina poems.



- Kathy, who took a disoriented, self-pitying M.B. from Manitoba and grounded me, helped me recover my romanticism, linked it to a profound realism, launched me in unexpected directions, and then travelled with me, always taking my grandiose visions and asking me to consider them in the complex tangles of everyday life.
- the complete works of Pablo Neruda—the best all-round poet of everyday life ever
- children: Matthew and Rebecca. If you have had kids, I don't need to explain. If you haven't had kids, no explanation is adequate.
- the complete works of Mary Oliver—the best human-nature poet ever
- The Phenomenon of Man by Teilhard de Chardin and related books, some more on the natural history side, and some more on the side of what that history might mean (Rats, Lice and History by Hans Zinsser; Plagues and Peoples by William McNeil; The Lives of a Cell by Lewis Thomas; The Parable of the Beast by John Bleibtreu), but all refusing to accept the ignorant fantasy that our biophysical natures can be separated from our spiritual aspirations, and that therefore philosophy and science and poetry can be explained by referring to different universes.
- *Echinococcus granulosus*, a tiny tapeworm of canids (dogs, foxes, wolves, coyotes, etc) that was my guru in Nepal. It passes out into the environment from canids, infects intermediate hosts (sheep, water buffalo, people, etc.) in which it creates slowly growing cysts full of baby tapeworms. When (if) the animal is killed, the dogs are fed the cysts (who wants to eat cysts?) and get re-infected. If people get the cysts, they are sick but usually a “dead end” host, unless a canid eats them. Investigating this problem in Kathmandu in the 1990s completely changed how I do and view science, knowledge, action, medicine, animals, ecology, culture, writing...well, my life.

RUNNING OUT OF MONEY IN CALCUTTA

In 1967, I was out-maneuvered on all fronts. My oldest sister had already gone to teach in Africa. My only brother had a full scholarship to Harvard. My dad quit his job in Winnipeg and my parents left home. The church college where Dad had worked for 20 years, and been president for seven, never publicly recognized that he had been there or was leaving. Rumor had it that they were afraid that if applicants knew my dad left, they might not apply.

What was left for me to do? How could I be a rebellious 1960s teenager? Trudeau said we should do something for our country. I worked a few months for a factory making cement curbs, then dropped out of university and hitchhiked to Montreal (where I wandered around Expo '67, and, in a spasm of Mennonite naiveté, posed nude for a local sculptor, imagining myself as Michelangelo's David), took a freighter to Europe, and then just kept going. This was my gift to Canada.

I thought I might go to the Greek Islands, where everyone else seemed to be going, but the tiny car full of happily inebriated Yugoslavs took me instead to the coastal town of Rijeka, in what is now Croatia. After a night sleeping among rocks and thorns beside the road, followed by a few other random rides by friendly strangers, I got picked up by a school bus going to Istanbul. The Greek Islands could wait.

In Istanbul, I met a group of travelers in a British military truck. For almost all the money I had left, they would take me overland to Kathmandu. I had heard of Istanbul, where Europe was forcibly made Christian, but Nepal and India were off the edge of the planet. I had no idea what was between here and there.

There were: markets (the real ones, not the virtual gambling casinos we call stock markets); the Mediterranean; deserts; ruins of crusaders and Persians; fear of sex; vaccines in hallways in a dirty Tehran hospital; stealing toilet paper from a Tehran Hilton Hotel; a non-Beatle haircut requirement at the Afghan border; hundreds of miles of bumpy, Russian-built concrete road; hundreds of miles of American-built smooth tarmac; a ghostly, empty luxury hotel in the rocky desert where the two roads met; and welcomes into homes for tea, or rice and curry, or shops to change money where the boy ran out the back door and disappeared with your travelers' checks.

By late December, 1967, in the blazingly hot, over-crowded, filthy streets of Calcutta, I was running out of money. I was also running out in other ways; at one point my uncontrollable diarrhea could only be relieved by stepping into a narrow side street, and, like any other human in that place, pulling down my pants and letting it out. Squatting there, I was both humiliated, and, in some small way, sent on the beginnings of a journey to claim my place as a member of the human species.

Revolted by white kids panhandling in India, humbled by the limits of my body and wits, I found the Mennonite Central Committee office and wandered in, looking for work. They were skeptical of a scruffy-looking kid with an Army-Navy backpack. But the director had been to the Bible college in Winnipeg and knew my Dad. I could scoff at the Menno-mafia, but I wasn't stupid. MCC needed someone to fill in until an American volunteer could get visa clearance. So I became an expert in rural development, hopped a train for Bihar, and spent my first night sleeping on the floor of a bookstore, brushing away the rats that nibbled at my ears.

The job lasted six months. But that is a different essay.

Here I have to back up a few scenes. We had to take a so-called "religion" course at the M.B. high school I attended. I remember one class; it was about original sin. The gist of what I took away from that class was that, if a non-Christian mother ran into a burning building to save her child, it was an act of selfishness. If a Christian mother did the same thing, it was a selfless act. There was us, who were going to heaven, and them, who were going to hell, and you couldn't tell the difference by just looking at the evidence.

In my travels in India and later Southeast Asia, I was taken in by families who fed me, gave me a place to sleep, and generally treated me, a stranger, with great generosity and kindness. In less than a year, I'd been hit in the spiritual plexus twice: religious institutions were as indifferent to humanity as any other (learned from my Dad's experience), and everything those institutions had taught me had to be re-examined (learned subsequently). Everything I had grown up with was tainted by bullshit, in the sense that philosopher Harry G. Frankfurt uses it in his little book of the same name. That is, not a lie, but verbiage indifferent to truth.

Now, in a state of shock, depression, and awe, I had to figure out the meaning of life from scratch. If I couldn't trust the teachings of my childhood, taught by people who had gained a state of unassailable righteousness by surviving the Russian Revolution, then I couldn't trust anyone, or any system where idea trumped evidence. They—Marxists, Buddhists, Hindus, Catholics,

Muslims, capitalists—were all bullshitters.

In retrospect, this explains two major themes of my life. The desire to find a community that would defer to evidence rather than dogma led me to science. My particular concern with bullshit may have led me to veterinary medicine, but that may itself be an idea related to bovine excrement. And the desire to re-connect with humanity in some meaningful way led me to literature.

In July of 1968, I took some comfort in a ratty copy of Song Offerings, by Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore, with a preface by WB Yeats. I had picked it up at a street vendor in Calcutta. I carried it with me everywhere. Once, book in hand, I sat staring out to sea on a wide, hazy beach south of Orissa. A businessman from Calcutta, walking past in his suit, barefoot in the sand, saw what I held in my hand. He sat next to me, closed his eyes, and sang several of the songs to me, and then continued on his way. It was a small gift, one human to another. For my own writing, for my life, that is the best I can hope for, to pass on these small gifts that make it possible to go on. **R**

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Mail Your Name To The Barn Door

A LITERARY TESTIMONY

Armin Wiebe was born in Altona, Manitoba. He has a Bachelor of Arts degree from University of Winnipeg and a Bachelor of Education degree from University of Manitoba and has taught at various levels in Manitoba and Northwest Territories. Most recently he taught Creative Writing in the Creative Communications program at Red River College in Winnipeg. Wiebe has served as writer-in-residence at the Saskatoon Public Library in Saskatchewan and at the Parkland Regional Library in Dauphin, Manitoba. He is the author of three comic Gutenthal novels, including *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens*; the award-winning novel *Tatsea*; and a stage play, *The Moonlight Sonata of Beethoven Blatz*. His "Backpage" column has appeared in most issues of *Rhubarb* since the inaugural issue. He lives in Winnipeg, somewhere to the south of the North Kildonan reserve.

Armin Wiebe

I was going to foist this Top Ten task off on Yasch Siemens and the Gutenthal badels so they could shusta together a 'Nachttopp Ten' list of major influences on their creator, but then they would highlight the beetfield yeshwieta of Bob and Elmer, Stan and Wayne, Carol and Irene. They would list literary influences such as the serialized Westerns and the farmer fiction of H. Gordon Green that appeared in the *Family Herald* and they would even bring out dirty secrets like how Wiebe used to read Ken Anderson Christian cowboy novels from the church library during the Sunday morning sermon and how one time he bought *Black Like Me* from a Sunday Night Christian Endeavour guest speaker peddling Christian literature in church who remarked with wonder that so many young people were drawn to that book. And then Yasch and his badels would

rummage through their creator's between-the-ears universe and find in the Rosengart school Willy Elias telling Wiebe the version of the "Three Musicians of Bremen" story found in the *Highroads to Reading* reader, the first time Wiebe ever experienced a friend getting so excited about a story from a reader that he had to tell the whole story from the beginning to the end where the rooster is crowing after the fleeing robber, "What did he do? What did he do?" And to show that a teacher's kid doesn't know everything Yasch would point out that Willy also taught Wiebe that the English word for Äajd is "harrow." Soon the Gutenthal badels would start remembering all the embarrassing things that Wiebe made them do in his million-seller books and they would laugh themselves silly in the Neche beer parlour when someone mentions that Wiebe invested all his royalty money in Infidelity Mutual Funds and all would agree that those sub-prime ponzi peckers can't even afford mistresses any more. The



Armin Wiebe in his blue Sunday suit forced to drink beer at a Hutterite wedding.

Gutenthal badels would have so much in-bred fun with this that soon they would make a proposal to the Rhubarb editors that the magazine should have a regular feature called “Beside the Nachttopp” where prominent persons would confess what reading material is featured in their bathrooms, and Politicks Paetkau would suggest that for sure the column should solicit titles from Mennonite politicians who have mistresses.

But enough of dummheit and prost; I shall try to slip “the surly bonds of earth” and be as lofty as the Aeroflot jet that carried a Mennonite reading *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens to Moscow*. The Mennonite was so embarrassed by the novel that he left it behind on the airplane, an action which may or may not have led to the tearing down of the Berlin wall; if this were a Tom Robbins novel, perhaps.... But how anyways is a writer supposed to reduce his influences to ten? I mean a writer who has only ten should maybe have his writing license revoked. Still, we are in a recession, they say, and maybe having too many influences can make a writer skate too close to the thin ice of the ponzi pond and maybe end up being ‘Loewened’ into the ground.

So I will stick with books—books that are not ranked in importance here, but are memorable for me in some personal way.

— Carol Shields, *Swann: A Mystery*

I read this novel while living in Lac La Martre, Northwest Territories. My writing soul was in a slump, confused, in that distracted state when new writing hasn’t found its focus yet, and the well-meaning enquiries about what are you writing now felt like that perhaps less well-meaning question: “Are you saved?” Carol Shields’s novel about an obscure poet named Mary Swann, who may have been murdered by her farmer husband, took me into a stimulating world of language that stirred my desire to write again. Remembering *Swann* also reminded me of a letter I received around that time from Gerry Brydon, then marketing assistant at Turnstone Press, just a short note saying hello and encouraging me to write. After I received the call that *Murder in Gutenthal* had been accepted, the first person I met on the street to share the news with was Carol Shields. Sadly though, by the time the novel was published, Gerry Brydon had committed suicide, apparently because so many of his friends were dying of AIDS.

— Robert Kroetsch, *What the Crow Said*

I was a student in Robert Kroetsch’s creative writing class at University of Manitoba when this novel was published. I had read his earlier novels and so was thrilled to be able to take a class from a writer who had published novels that I had read. When I shyly pulled the \$12 hardcover from my briefcase to be signed, his reaction was one of pleased surprise, and I got the impression that I may have been the only student in the class to go out to buy his new book. (In more recent years I have come to accept that having college students purchase their instructor’s books is mostly a rarity.) Aside from my connection to the author, what made *What the Crow Said* resonate for me was the way he used the details of mid-century prairie life to create myth. Sure, he played post-modern games, but what really influenced me were his descriptions of the six Lang daughters scampering about the farm doing their chores. It’s okay to write with what you know; you don’t have to be boring or preachy while doing it—you can have fun. (When my Aunt Rose, who was also Miriam Toews’s mother’s best friend, read my first *Yasch* stories, she asked whether people were allowed to write like that. Kroetsch gave me permission to.)

— Rudy Wiebe, *Playing Dead*

Sometimes I am resistant to reading a book, judging a book by its cover, so to speak. Then the thrill of having the book cut through the resistance is one to savour. Prairie Fire asked me to review *Playing Dead: A Contemplation Regarding the Arctic* shortly after I had moved back to Winnipeg after living for six years in the “sub-arctic.” I’ve always been sort of an ethno-centric guy, so I carried with me the annoyance that Yellowknife, the capital of the Northwest Territories situated in the heart of Dogrib and Dene lands, was filled with Inuit images, while barely acknowledging Dene culture at all. So when I saw “Arctic” in the sub-title, I groaned inwardly, “Not another book about Eskimos.” However, book in hand, I headed over to the old Eaton’s car-park where I was to meet my wife, and as I waited for my ride I began to read Rudy Wiebe’s meditations. By the time the family car honked at me, I was twenty-five pages into the book and I kept reading all the way home. In some ways I could say the book is resonating with me still.

— Margaret Atwood, *Cat’s Eye*

I picked up *Cat’s Eye* late one afternoon after a day of writing, many years after I had become bogged down with Atwood’s earlier novel *Life Before Man*. I had avoided her novels except for *The Handmaid’s Tale* since then, but I got caught up in *Cat’s Eye* from the first page, and became an Atwood fan again, until she let me down with *Oryx and Crake*.

— John Irving, *The Hotel New Hampshire*

Although I had enjoyed *The World According to Garp*, *The Hotel New Hampshire* sat on my shelf unread for a number of years, until one day, again in late afternoon, my wife’s daycare still in session downstairs, I opened the novel and before I got called to make the supper I was over a hundred pages into the novel, completely immersed in Irving’s quirky characters. I have enjoyed many of Irving’s subsequent novels, but couldn’t get past page 40 of *A Son of the Circus* because there was so much unnecessary repetition. (In his lengthy forward Irving boasted about having pulled his editor out of retirement, and I kept thinking, no, you didn’t.) I did read *A Widow for One Year* and while the trademark weird characters and strange events were there, I felt that something was missing, that Irving was going through the motions and not imagining deeply.

— David Bergen, *Sitting Opposite My Brother*

I began to read David Bergen’s collection of short stories when I was mentally exhausted, and I was writing, too, at the time, and when I am writing, when I am in the middle of a novel, I have very little patience with the books I pick up to read. At such times I am seeking something that I can often not define to myself, let alone someone else. It’s like having a craving to eat, but there is nothing appetizing in the fridge. So I will toss books aside after a page or two, and reach for another. Some fiction writers say they only read non-fiction while they are writing fiction, whereas I find myself looking for fiction, often fiction that may have similarities to what I am trying to write. Bergen’s stories sliced through my malaise. I think what makes his early stories so strong, and his novels as well, is his fearless willingness to go where his characters go, see what they see, smell what they smell, think what they think, do what they do. (I always found it amusing that the mail-order bookseller, Mennonite Books, had language and content warnings beside my Gutenthal novels, while Bergen’s books had none.)

– David Elias, *Crossing the Line*

When I first read David Elias's description of his youthful characters gazing down from the hilltop over the valley dotted with the villages of the West Reserve all the way to the looming white oil tanks at Gretna, I said, wow, Elias is writing about a landscape and place no one has ever written about before. His subsequent collection *Places of Grace* and his novel *Sunday Afternoon* explore the world of Mennonite village life in a fascinating blending of the traditional and the modern.

– Sandra Birdsell, *The Missing Child*

My brother was born during the 1950 Red River flood, safe from the floodwaters in Winkler, though the flood, especially as it affected Morris, loomed large in family lore. Many a time I heard my mother tell people that her son had been born in '50 during the flood. My brother didn't live to see the '66 flood or the subsequent more serious floods, and I grew up without a brother. Sandra Birdsell and I had a conversation one evening about losing loved ones and she suggested that writers become writers because they have lost someone. Of all of Sandra's wonderful books, I always think of *The Missing Child* first, of Minnie Pullman standing among the tangled growth of the river, singing in the opening scene. The novel's title may mean many things, but to me the novel is formed from what the child, now missing perhaps, has absorbed, picked up, gathered, breathed in, feared, dreamed.

– Guy Vanderhaeghe, *The Englishman's Boy*

I read *The Englishman's Boy* during an impromptu road trip my wife and I embarked on in July, 2003. We drove west through Saskatchewan on the highway south of the Trans-Canada until we arrived in the Cypress Hills. I finished reading the novel, which culminates with the Cypress Hills massacre, in an East End motel the evening after we had visited a dinosaur dig. The next day we visited Fort Walsh, where our tour guide was a Nakota woman who told us her people's story of the Cypress Hills massacre on the location where it occurred.

– Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent*

I can't recall exactly what attracted me to this book by a religion professor, but it introduced me to the world of scholarly investigation of the origins of Christianity. What fascinated me was her writing about the diversity of the early Christian world, a world with a multitude of gospels and novels and other literary works being written about the time of Christ. (Whose idea was it anyway that the novel is an English invention?) One story Pagels refers to is "The Acts of Paul and Thecla," a story of a teenage groupie who chases after Paul intent on helping him with his preaching, much to his chagrin and the alarm of Thecla's parents. Pagels's other books, including *The Gnostic Gospels*, led me to discover Harold Bloom's *The Book of J*, in which he presents a theory that the earliest strand of the Old Testament, the story of Moses and so on, is really a novel written by someone in King David's court to celebrate the accomplishments of the great king. Bloom makes an argument, based on literary analysis of the language of the original texts, that this novel may well have been written by a woman. Of course, the storyteller in me immediately wondered what kind of woman would have written the Bible, and it didn't take long for me to decide that it had to be someone like Oata Siemens. That's how it came about that she wrote *The Second Coming of Yeeat Shpanst* in her farmers' union notebooks with a carpenter's pencil. **R**

WITH THE FLOW

Rudy Wiebe was born in an isolated farm community of about 250 people in a rugged but lovely region near Fairholme, Saskatchewan. His parents had escaped Soviet Russia with five children in 1930, part of the last generation of homesteaders to settle the Canadian West. Widely published internationally and winner of numerous awards, including two Governor-General's Awards for Fiction, Wiebe is the author of nine novels, four short-story collections, and ten non-fiction books. His latest publications include a novel of the historical Mennonite diaspora *Sweeter Than All the World*, (2001); the children's book *Hidden Buffalo*, (2003) based on a Cree creation legend and illustrated by Michael Lonechild; an autobiography, *Of This Earth: A Mennonite Boyhood in the Boreal Forest* (2006); and the biography *Big Bear in the "Extraordinary Canadians" series* (2008). He is an Officer of the Order of Canada and lives in Edmonton.

Rudy Wiebe

Rhubarb asks: what are "the TOP 10 influences that shaped" me in my seven and a half decades of life? To quote a book of mine, "Childhood (or one's entire life) can only remain what you have not forgotten."

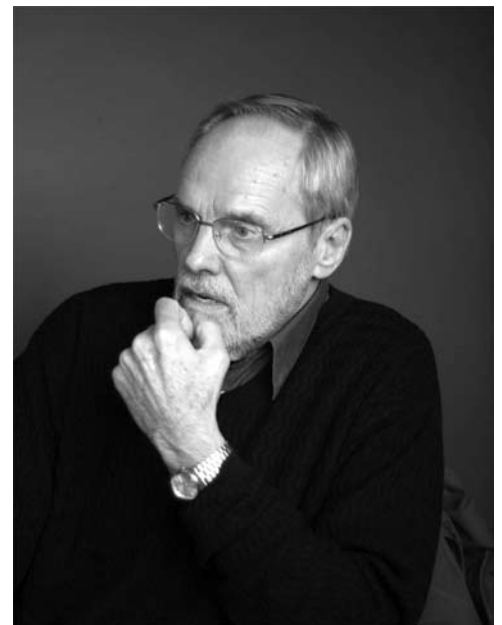
When, in a previous millennium, I retired from writing and teaching at the University of Alberta, I gave three hour-long talks entitled, "An Invention of Influences." They were:

1. The Discovery of Deserts, Giants and Sewers;
2. The Artifice of an Iron Hand
3. Articulating the Skull in the Swamp

Rhubarb has no space for hours of wandering in the boreal bush of my scribbling past, but, to go anywhere, even briefly, I do need some definitions. Influence: a noun, formed by the preposition "in" plus the Latin "to flow." The noun *influent* is even clearer: "that which flows in." Is Rhubarb asking: what, in a lifetime, has flowed in you, Rudy Wiebe? Or is it "flowed into," or "flowed through/within/past/under/over/beside/ out of/against," all those powerful, essential prepositions which in English shape-shift and control our meanings? Or is the question really: what, with all this flowing somewhere in you, has remained behind to make you the writer you continue trying to become? Tell us, make it up (down/out?) as necessary.

Okay. I will say nothing about my immediate family, without which my actual life is unimaginable; that story is for another place, not here. So, whatever or wherever the flow, what remains behind in me:

The place where I was born: the vanished homestead-farm community of some thirty-five families (250 people) at Speedwell in the boreal forest east of Turtle Lake, north of North Battleford, Saskatchewan. No human being now lives on Speedwell land, Township 53, Range 17, west of the Third Meridian. In 1971 the hills and sloughs and creek-beds and all the log farmsteads, except



2007

photo by Andrew Rurak

for several small woodlots reserved for wild animal shelter, were bulldozed, burned, and seeded to grass to make a summer cattle pasture. However, the Speedwell Mennonite Brethren Church Cemetery does remain, circled by aspen and beautifully cared for beside the cattle corrals. Thirty-two persons are buried there, a row of children, a row of men, and a row of women, 1932 to 1948, including my teenage sister in 1945.

Jesus Christ: his life and his stories. It seems to me his spirit moved in me while I grew into being in my mother's womb and, in various and complex ways, has never left me. I hope.

My mother: she lived her long life in Low German, "oabeid enn hohp" (work and hope), and in High German, "Dem Mutigen gehört die Welt." (The world belongs to the daring/the courageous.)

Reading: numberless books that, to quote a novel of mine, "allow you to hear human voices speaking from everywhere and every age, saying things both sweet and horrible, and everything else that might be imagined between them." Tena, my wife, tells me the foundation corner of our house is cracked from the weight of my library; true, there is a large crack, but I'm convinced her office of books and records is making its own contribution.

Forms of writing: beginning with dribblets of songs and rhymes spinning in my head which I eventually thought could be poems; struggling to write short stories, essays, dramas, sermons, novels, creative non-fiction, postmodern historio-graphic metafiction (I never said that: blame the critics), readings; editing a news magazine and collections of short stories, illustrated children's stories, film scripts (original and adapted, with some even produced), illustrated historical books filled with participants' first-hand accounts, living and dead biography and autobiography, etc., etc. And even within such specific forms as short story or novel, which have constituted most of my writing, the shape of any one can become so complicated that writing the next one becomes a continuation of finding the impossible possible.

Mennonite heritage: none of us choose our ancestors, and I have at times found my ancestral lineage, often obscure, stimulating beyond measure. Exploring five centuries of my world-wandering Canadian, Paraguayan/German, Russian/Ukrainian, Polish/Prussian, Frisian/Flemish family offered more than enough stories for seven lifetimes.

Big Bear: the wise and brilliant Plains Cree chief who in 1876 refused to "touch the pen" to Treaty 6 because he recognized it gave the Canadian government control ("When I see you, I feel the rope around my neck.") over everything native. His life, and that of his descendents to this day; the story of the continuing creation of our shared homeland Canada from sea to sea to sea.

(Big Bear, a power in my life, as if I continuously dreamed him—though I have never been conscious of that dreaming in my sleep, only when awake. As though, once I had climbed Bull's Forehead Hill above the confluence of the Red Deer and the South Saskatchewan Rivers—the place where in 1838/9 he was given his bear vision—and Elder John Tootoosis of the Poundmaker First Nation had shown me the place of his burial in 1888 on the bank of the Battle River, and in New York's American Museum of Natural History I had held in my hands the core of his scared bundle—the great bear paw complete with claws he had, as instructed in the vision, sewn onto a bib of red stroud—and I had been forgiven for opening the bundle cloths without knowing the proper songs to sing, nor prayers to speak, and alone, without a circle of believers to assist me; after that, his spirit began to live in my imagination beyond my knowing, and would remain.)

West Germany in 1957-58: no one truly knows his own place until he has traveled to others and learned to recognize difference. The gift of a Rotary Fellowship gave me two semesters at the University of Tübingen (founded in 1479) and, besides delightful marriage, travels throughout Württemberg, Bavaria, Austria, Switzerland, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Great Britain. Also two train trips, Lethbridge to Montreal and back, and the indescribable beauty of a sunlit day sailing down the St. Lawrence River until sunset carried us below the red-blazing fortress of Quebec City. Plus eight days on the North Atlantic, going and coming, with enough heaving ocean for bountiful seasickness.

Frederick Millington Salter: professor of English at the University of Alberta who taught me my first writing course and, in 1959, told me that there were no doubt numberless students capable of writing an acceptable M.A. thesis on Shakespeare, but, perhaps, only I could write a good novel about Canadian Mennonites. He dared me to try it; and I dared.

Students in creative writing workshops: in Canada, the United States and Germany. I will not name any, some now brilliant writers; but the hundreds of imaginations I have encountered, and the places they have taken me, remain subliminally everywhere. **R**

RESURRECTION

Sarah Klassen

No one in Barvenkovo had ever actually seen Tsar Nicholas, though photographs of him and his Tsarina, the gracious and vulnerable Alexandra, were given a place of honour in some homes, the handsome couple facing the camera, surrounded by their pretty daughters and the young Tsarovich, a boy in a sailor suit who lived in constant danger of bleeding to death.

When rumours of the assassination of the imperial family reached Barvenkovo a sense of doom settled on the Franz family. Joseph tried to keep the news from Hanna whose cough grew worse each day, but she heard it from a neighbour and couldn't stop crying. They both believed monarchs and emperors, though imperfect, were ordained by God to rule over the people who had an obligation of loyalty towards them. Where was respect for authority? Where was the compassion for a mother whose son was a victim of the bleeding sickness?

But the murdered family was not uppermost in the minds of Joseph and Hanna on the night they climbed with their two children into the droschke after nightfall and Joseph whipped the horses into motion while the others huddled together. They moved as swiftly and stealthily as darkness and deeply-rutted streets and the

clip-clop of horses' hoofs allowed. The direction Joseph had struck led away from their sturdy brick house with its solid furniture—the oak table, the handmade wooden sleeping benches with feather bedding folded into them, chests with drawers full of hemstitched shirts and linens. It led away from the Lutz factory toward the outskirts of the town.

The red and white armies were poised to converge on Barvenkovo and there was no safety for owners of property or employers of peasants and the landless. Insurrection was in the air. A sympathetic worker at the factory had whispered in Joseph's ear. "For you, it is very dangerous." Shocked by the unveiled hatred in the faces of his workers, Joseph had acted decisively for once.

"Quick," he had ordered tersely. "Warm coats for everyone. Blankets."

Maria was ordered to wrap up roasted zwieback. Simon was sent to find his mother's woollen shawl. Hanna boiled eggs and water for prips which she poured into bottles. Joseph harnessed the horses. Everything had been stowed hastily in the droschke and they had set out like thieves into the night. It was April, and although the days were warm, the nights

remained damp and cool.

Their vehicle passed the small shop where the best candy in Barvenkovo was sold, the roof and tables of the town's market and a weathered, abandoned warehouse. No lights anywhere. Joseph stiffened when just ahead of them a shape stepped out of the darkness at the side of the street, raised a lantern, and called out: "Halt! Halt!" The man was accompanied by six or seven others, some of them armed, their weapons glinting in the lantern's light. The Franz family was ordered out, their wagon and horses commandeered for purposes more urgent than the needs of fear-driven refugees. Wounded soldiers were waiting to be taken to the train station. A driver was needed too, Joseph was told. There was no point in objecting.

Joseph drew Hanna's shawl more tightly around her shoulders and ordered the children to carry the bundles. He pointed to the warehouse they had just passed. "It will be open," he whispered to Hanna, then repeated for Maria when he saw how his wife's face paled and her thin shoulders sagged. "If there's a cellar, go down. I will find you." He gave Maria his lantern, relieved when the waiting men made no objection to that. He climbed back into the wagon, took the reins and drove away with men he had no reason to trust.

Yes, the warehouse was open. Hanna entered first, shining the lantern around until she found a trapdoor to a cellar. They felt their way down the broken ladder into blackness so deep it threatened to overwhelm their weak light. Later, Hanna would confess she had believed she was leading her children in a descent into hell. They groped in the subterranean darkness, testing the ground under their feet, bumping into obstacles. The obstacles were wooden crates, a few of them sturdy enough to sit on. The mother kept her children close, one on either side so they could lean against her and she could place an arm around them, or they around her. And so they braced themselves to endure the slow passage of the hours until the eventual breaking of a new day that would bring hope of rescue.

Dull thuds of distant gunfire somewhere over Barvenkovo punctuated the sombre hours, and occasionally the trio could hear the tramp of feet passing by in the street, and voices, agitated, shrill. "Shhh," Hanna cautioned and they held their breath until their lungs were ready to explode. Hanna struggled to control her rasping cough. No one must hear, no one must know there were fugitives hiding in the empty building. But a cough has a life of its own and though she tried to smother it in her shawl, she wasn't always successful.

Simon shrieked into the darkness, "A rat, Mama!

There's a rat! I saw two eyes."

"Sssh." Hanna placed her hand over her son's eyes. "Sssh. No rat, Simon. You're just dreaming." But she knew he was not. She had heard scuttling in the dark and had seen the light of the lantern reflected in two pin point eyes. "Sleep. Simon," she said. As if anyone could in such a place.

Maria wanted to scream too, but instead she sat tense on her box, pressed so close against her mother she could feel the heaving of each smothered cough.

Only this morning, when the world still held together, Maria and her friend Nettie had slipped out of the orchard and hurried along the street, keeping close to the picket fences, avoiding adults who would tell them to run home, quick, it's not safe in the street. Nettie had brought a few pennies to spend at the small shop. They bought a handful of red and yellow candy and shared it, leaning against the building away from the street. The storekeeper's cat brushed against their legs and they bent to stroke its black fur. Then, giggling, they had flown home, passing the Friesen yard where the Friesen boys were grooming their riding horse. One of the boys had waved a brush and shouted something, his face grave, but the girls only giggled harder and ran faster. Maria had arrived home breathless, just as her father arrived too with the news that they must leave.

And now here she was, in this black hole, without her father, her brother scared half to death and her mother unable to stop coughing. Her own bed, the family house, the street running past it, had become a faint and distant dream. Would they ever see their house again? She had heard about the Tsarina and her daughters, driven out of the palace. Where had the princesses tried to hide? Had their mother coughed without stopping like hers?

Hanna knew it was morning when shafts of light fell through cracks between the floor boards, cutting into their dank refuge, creating a striped pattern on the dirt floor.

"What's that!" Simon yelled, waking. He, at least, had dozed, off and on. Now he noticed thin, pale fingers poking through gunnysacks filled with something bumpy.

"Potatoes," Hanna said. "They want to grow because now it's spring." At least we won't have to starve, she thought, if help is slow in coming. If it comes at all. Maria would say no thanks to a raw potato. Not for me. Simon would refuse too. Hanna, knowing more, fearing more than her children, wondered if it would come to that—hunger so urgent they would tear open the sacks and pull out these abandoned potatoes and eat them

raw after brushing the loose dirt from their skins.

The gunfire of the previous night had stopped. The noise from the street seemed like the ordinary bustle of a day beginning. Maria thought she heard birdsong as she pulled out the zwieback the Russian maid had toasted to a crisp yesterday before she left Barvenkovo and fled to the village of her parents. While Maria doled out the zwieback, Hanna unwrapped a bottle of cold prips. Simon wanted to dip his bread into it, but there were no cups, they had to take turns drinking from the bottle.

All day they waited, listening for footsteps that might signal Joseph's return. And their rescue. Or the opposite: discovery by bandits or soldiers. Hanna rationed the food, alert to any sound from the door. No one came. With better light, she saw that there were enough crates to arrange as makeshift beds for her children. She set them to work, preparing for another night. Maria lured Simon into games. She kept up a lively conversation to scare away the rats. Sometimes she sang: "Ein bluemlein steht im Walde." She wondered if that forest was as dark as this cellar had been last night. Hanna walked back and forth in the dampness hoping to restore warmth to her feet and fingers.

At night the gunfire resumed, the rats surveyed the intruders with their sharp eyes, Hanna shivered under her shawl and Maria dreamt that a dark figure was dragging her from her bed. Simon slept through it all.

On their third morning underground, Hanna rose chilled to the bone. They were out of food. Her coughing, aggravated by the damp cold, had become constant. Her chest was raw. She stiffened when she heard the door to the warehouse creak open. Ssh, she cautioned and pulled her children close, pressing their faces against her skirt. The trap door opened and a square of light appeared on the cellar floor. A dark figure was descending the wooden ladder. Panic rose in her throat and she was afraid she would not have enough strength to hold it in. Were they discovered? Or rescued? She had almost despaired of rescue, hadn't dared to believe it when last night she had noticed the gunfire had not resumed.

The descending figure was Joseph. It was really Joseph, gaunt and unshaven, stumbling down the ladder, everything about him altered. In the underground gloom it seemed as if he was much older than when


he'd left them, but he greeted them with a show of good cheer and the children left off clinging to Hanna and came forward timidly. "Papa," they said, their voices soft and filled with amazement. "Papa."

Joseph helped Hanna climb up the shaky ladder. The children followed and all four emerged into the blinding light of the morning sun. Joseph took Simon's hand. "Wait," he said and let Hanna and Maria get a head start. A group of four would be too visible. Their presence in the street must be as unremarkable as possible and above suspicion. Joseph was afraid of what awaited them. Hanna, whenever she was sure she couldn't take one more step, summoned another breath, another small burst of energy. Every time she saw someone approaching or heard footsteps or merely thought she did, she longed for the earth to open up and swallow them, all four. Maria gripped her mother's hand, pulling her along the last stretch toward home.

The door to their brick house was swinging crazily on its hinges, and when they entered it they found themselves in a peculiar haze. The bedding had been slashed, releasing a cloud of goose feathers, and the down sailed slowly, dreamily around the room, drifting, floating as if intending to occupy all available space. Maria thought she was walking into an eerie dream, a dream that must be harmless because how much harm can feathers do? But the mud-streaked floor carried the prints of enormous boots, drawers had been yanked right out and lay overturned in the mud, their contents of hemstitched pillow cases and linen towels flung everywhere. Someone's knife had gouged the oak table's gleaming surface. When she saw the gash, Hanna broke down and wept.

"But we are alive," Joseph said. "And they have gone."

Maria wanted to ask the question that had troubled her at night in the cellar when she couldn't sleep: Who exactly were 'they?' But her mother was sobbing in her father's arms and Simon was running like a dervish from room to room, feathers swirling around his head.

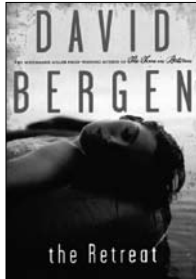
It was Easter morning, 1918. It's possible that in Barvenkovo cowed believers made their way stealthily into the sanctuary of an orthodox church and perhaps a priest dared to greet them with the words: Kristos voskrese. And the congregation replied, not with a shout but a whisper, Voistinu voskrese. 

Reviews

Struggling for air

Bergen, David. *The Retreat*. McClelland & Stewart, 2008.

Reviewed by Barbara Nickel



If the title of David Bergen's latest novel calls up a relaxing getaway, or for you of Mennonite upbringing those ubiquitous weekends away for youth, women, men, pastors, deacons, singles, couples, newlyweds, seniors, babies, dogs, etc., don't be fooled. *The Retreat* mines many of its title's definitions—the verb in its military sense, the noun as a place of seclusion—but the image of “retreat” as pastors' picnic is purely ironic; Bergen's characters are, in many ways and with varying degrees of intensity, engaged in a struggle for survival.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the two riveting scenes that bookend the novel, each featuring one of a pair of brothers. At the novel's outset in Kenora, Ontario in 1973, Raymond Seymour, Ojibway, 18 years old, is dangerously dating the white niece of Earl Hart, the racist town constable, who takes the offending Native to a remote island and leaves him for dead. Raymond survives, barely. At the other end of the novel, Raymond's brother Nelson hides from the law in a freezer in the town dump. Tested to psychological and physical limits, Nelson is nearing death when he's finally rescued.

Between is the story of the Byrd family, who travel from Calgary in the summer of 1974 to attend a commune on the outskirts of Kenora, a place founded by Doctor Amos on his notions of spiritual refuge and improvement. Various entanglements ensue. Mrs. Byrd, in search of herself, who has dragged her husband and four children to the Retreat in hopes of finding “salvation”, begins an affair with the doctor. Lizzy, the eldest of the Byrd children, cares for her siblings in her mother's stead and also becomes romantically involved with Raymond. Lizzy and her brothers also encounter Nelson, who was separated from his Ojibway family as a child and taken to live for ten years with a Mennonite family in Manitoba, but is now staying with Raymond. Everett, Lizzy's fourteen-year-old younger brother,

forms an attachment to Nelson. Fish, the youngest Byrd child, becomes lost in the forest, another survival story. Mrs. Byrd leaves shortly afterward. Mr. Byrd waits for her return at the Retreat, struggling to care for his children and make sense of his relationships.

All of this is set during the Ojibway occupation of Anicinabe Park, which Bergen himself has stated “stands at the periphery of the novel,” adding in an interview in the *Toronto Star* that the novel is a story of “children being at the mercy of adults, how that happens and what happens to the kids.”

Which explains why the kittens had to drown. Early on in the novel, three kittens, the beloved pets of the Byrd family, are tossed into a lake in a gunnysack by Mr. Byrd because, the parents argue, the doctor doesn't allow pets and how would the kittens survive? One wonders why four children who presumably have friends in Calgary would not have been able to find summer homes for their pets. This is never explained, and so the drowning, especially so early on, takes on a contrived weight.

It's surprising that Bergen, normally a writer of great control and sophistication, would underline his themes in this way. But you feel the author's hand again later on with Mrs. Byrd's departure, when she conveniently leaves behind the journal containing her intimate thoughts for Everett to read, as well as her red dress, worn significantly in her absence by both Lizzy and Everett in key scenes with Raymond and Nelson. Indeed, the believability of the Retreat itself is called into question when you discover that its members are actually forced to salvage bread from the Dumpster. Why do they stay on? It might be the charismatic leadership, the vision and force of Doctor Amos, except we don't see enough of him or his interactions to believe that he could draw from the commune such a commitment.

To structure a novel in the arena of a retreat is to create a space where many characters and their stories come and go. The problem is that too many stories can compete for space and focus, and so the stories needing to be told don't get the attention they deserve. During Nelson's first appearance in the novel, he summarizes himself to Lizzy, “The family I lived with was religious and I went to a Mennonite church for a while and then I went to the Pentecostal Church where people spoke in tongues and moved their hands through the air and one night Pastor Phil tried to raise a cat from the dead. There were good things, though, living in Lesser. We

had linoleum on the kitchen floor and I learned to play viola. You play an instrument?"

Later we're told that Nelson "never spoke of the past or what had happened" so it's odd that he'd summarize his past to Lizzy upon first meeting. Perhaps I'm biased because I have an aboriginal brother adopted into my Mennonite family during the Sixties Scoop, but I can't imagine my brother, or anyone for that matter, actually speaking that way. This is another surprise from Bergen, usually a master of dialogue that is both realistic and taut. We're told that Nelson "desperately missed" his adoptive family and that he played the viola but these things are never knitted into the fabric of his character or the novel. His story, which could be its own novel, hangs underdeveloped at the edges, like the occupation at Anicnabe Park, a conflict of national proportions only glimpsed here, or the Byrd family drama, or the Retreat and its plethora of characters.

The story of Raymond and Lizzy stands out as the most compelling. Beginning with Raymond's island survival, the development of their relationship, the tensions of sex and race and age that drive it, are rendered with great believability, and one wishes for this story the miracle of page-turning focus that was Bergen's Giller Prize-winning *The Time in Between*.

One might argue that *The Retreat's* love story depends for its survival on a multiplicity of other stories to feed it. Perhaps, but in the relatively small space of 321 pages, this is a strategy and structure that leaves everyone struggling for air.

Barbara Nickel's latest novel, *Hannah Waters and the Daughter of Johann Sebastian Bach*, was short-listed for the Governor-General's Award. She lives and writes in Yarrow, B.C.

Longing for transcendence

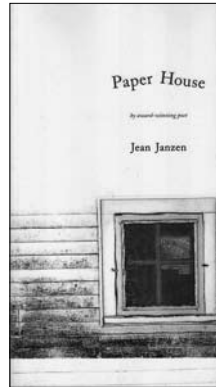
Janzen, Jean, *Paper House*. Good Books, Intercourse, PA, 2008. 74 pages, soft cover.

Reviewed by Carla Funk

Jean Janzen has anchored the temporal and ethereal to earth's dust and shadows in her fourth collection of poems, *Paper House*. These are poems that reach back into history and across geography, most often through a first-person speaker who recounts from memory or meditates on the transient present. These poems do not take formal risks, nor do they push the reader's conceptual boundaries of poetry, but they do

risk a frank devotion to God, the Scriptures, and to a kingdom not of this world.

Janzen's is a vision that finds knowledge of the holy in the broken, fading things of earth. Her poems, descending from a literary tradition rooted in Christian spirituality, offer a softer Donne, a calmer Hopkins, a less elliptical Dickinson, and welcome the reader to a lucid poetry. The word "accessible", in our postmodern mood, can seem more curse than blessing, especially when taken as "undemanding" or "easy." Janzen avoids



these problems of accessibility by way of images that take hold of life's ordinary details with clarity and wisdom. They are gifts given to the reader with compelling humility. *Paper House* quietly argues that all of life—from gladioli stalks to the man who mows the cemetery lawns, "mustache damp/ in December fog, his headphones full of love songs" (62)—demands spiritual attention.

Throughout *Paper House*, Biblical narrative is the primary context in which personal experience and family history find their meaning. In "This Body", the speaker references the Apostle Paul as she meditates on the tension between the transience of sensuality and the glorified, resurrected body which "will rise one day in new splendor // which is nothing without food and love" (46). Acknowledging mortality, the speaker in "Toward the Final Night" asserts that "We're in the time of waiting for our salvation," (62) and likens the journey toward death to that of the weary Magi. In "Beloved", the power of the original Word manifests itself in the human word, and in the language of creation:

Word, says the grass as it rises in this empty space.
Word, says the bone as it breaks and mends.
This world so full, it presses against us. (41)

This knitting together of personal memory and meditation with an ancient framework also shows up in the musical rhythms of these poems. Many lines arrive as pure iambic pentameter, while others use anaphora and parallelism to call forth Biblical poetic techniques. The effect is a unifying one, though at times, the voice falls into expected patterns. Several poems in this collection close with the same structure, whereby a phrase repeats in variation, for example: "one for tenderness, one for loss" (18); "How she took it with her,/ how it stays" (28); "as we / breathed 'mercy'; as we breathed 'help.'" (30); "to be broken, to be turned" (31). Janzen's poems

achieve a richer and more arresting closure when their rhythms and language unsettle:

Look, the doctor is opening a bottle of sweet liquor
and pouring it into a thousand glasses.
This one is for you. (61)

These poems are strongest when they surprise with a less predictable word or phrase. In “For Eastertide”, a sub-poem from the five-poem sequence “Instructions”,

Christ unwraps
his graveclothes

slips through
the tight molecules

to sit down
and eat with you.

The harmonizing of “Christ” with “tight molecules” not only pitches the human in a divine key, but also creates assonantal chime, as well as a little buzz of linguistic surprise.

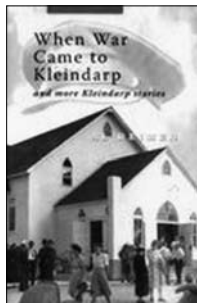
When the poems in *Paper House* sing like this, they sing most memorably. With this music, Janzen makes new tunes out of old notes, and in doing so, sets inside the ribcage a little ache of longing for transcendence, the “familiar beat, ‘I am, I am’” (6).

Carla Funk served as the City of Victoria’s inaugural poet laureate from 2006-2008. In 2010, her fourth collection of poems will appear with Turnstone Press. She teaches in the Department of Writing at the University of Victoria.

Where nothing really changes

Reimer, Al. *When War Came to Kleindarp*. Rosetta Projects, 2008. Paper. 145 pages

Reviewed by Adrienne Redekopp



Imagine sitting at your grandfather’s knee or at your grandmother’s kitchen table as she prepares supper. As always, a story begins to unfold, relating a life before passenger jets or televisions, microwaves or radios.

Al Reimer’s new short story collection, *When War Came to Kleindarp and More Kleindarp*

Stories describe Mennonite life “back then.” Like the story of a wise grandparent, each new voice imparts a

bit of wisdom about the world and about life in general. Unlike most elders’ stories, however, each narrative is injected with some irreverence—the details people might like to forget, or carefully omit. In “Hey, Think You’re Charlie Conacher?” Danny Brandt longs to see a hockey game, but is prevented by the sinister and sadistic rink patrol, who long for purpose and find none. And later, as Danny attends a revival, we find out that the small town life of Kleindarp that creates a happy childhood is not the place for a doubting adolescent.

When War Came to Kleindarp is reminiscent of Rohinton Mistry’s *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, stories of a community far from perfect, but bound together by common culture and strong beliefs. Reimer challenges an idealistic view of Mennonite life, revealing both the sins and sacrifices of the people of Kleindarp. Though each story brings with it a unique kind of hope, there remains a sense of lack—a feeling that this community has somehow missed the point of the morals and values that they so loudly proclaim to the world around. Individual characters, however, find small glimpses of redemption in the simple act of living out one’s calling, as in “Opening and Closing the Door to Life” for Anna Brandt, or in leaving the confines of a restrictive community to pursue an artist’s dream for Wilhelm and Evan in “Mennonite Firebirds.”

The stories in this collection flow together as a set of reflections on the concerns and costs faced by a people called to live apart. Reimer’s juxtaposition of “simple life” stories from childhood, with later adult responses and understandings, makes for a rich mix of storytelling that relate across generational barriers. Occasionally, it feels like Reimer might be pushing for a happy ending where none feels natural. In “A Pocketful of Sugar Cubes,” Mel’s turnaround seems sudden and slightly contrived. Nonetheless, the story is a comforting depiction of home as a place where nothing really changes, not even the boys sneaking sugar cubes at weddings and funerals.

When War Came to Kleindarp is well worth the read for anyone who enjoys looking back with some nostalgia, without erasing the faults and failures inevitable to humanity. Reimer’s book succeeds in telling the story of a people who, though different individually, manage to maintain a community that holds together through war and fire, life and death. Our grandparents’ stories told with sarcasm and wit, and a bit of sugar to help it all go down.

Adrienne Redekopp is an aspiring writer from Winnipeg, MB. She loves hearing her grandparents’ stories over and over again, no matter how many variations they come up with.

Family, land, and church

Neufeld, Mary. *A Prairie Pilgrim: Wilhelm H. Falk*, self-published, 2008, 461 pages.

Reviewed by Armin Wiebe



Mary Neufeld's *A Prairie Pilgrim* is a big book, and the number of pages between its covers is the least of the reasons for calling it big. Neufeld has written a biography of her father Wilhelm H. Falk, and in doing so has also written a comprehensive family history, a history of the Rudnerweider Church, and made a significant contribution to the social history of the Mennonite West Reserve in Manitoba during the first three-quarters of the 20th century. On top of all that, Neufeld has written an absorbing saga that should have appeal for readers who have little or no connection to the players involved.

One of four Sommerfelder Mennonite Church ministers who founded the Rudnerweider Church in 1937, Wilhelm H. Falk was elected to serve as the new church's first bishop, a role to which he dedicated himself until he was pressured into resigning in 1955. The author admits that in part her motivation for writing this biography is to correct the misrepresentation of her father in previous histories of the Rudnerweider Church and to restore Bishop Falk's reputation. To do this Mary Neufeld follows her father's philosophy of considering all sides of an issue and through diligent research and at times painfully candid accounts of events gleaned from interview subjects presents the reader with what appears to be a balanced, objective account of what happened to her father and his church. There is much here for "church policy wonks" to chew on.

But what gives this biography a more general appeal is that it is the story of a remarkable family, or rather, two families, for Wilhelm H. Falk already had a large family when his first wife died in childbirth and he then married a woman 20 years his junior with whom he had another large family. The challenges faced by a stepmother barely out of her teens in taking charge of a household of six children, some of whom are almost as old as she is, are candidly described, warts and all. Keeping the farm running during Wilhelm Falk's frequent church business trips and maintaining a public image appropriate for a minister's and later a bishop's family are all a part of the young stepmother's burden,

which is not lightened by gossip labeling her as the girl who seduced the bishop.

Mary Neufeld has written the book in a readable narrative style and has a keen sense of when the reader may begin to tire of one thread or theme. So after delving into the intrigues of church politics for a part of a chapter she always brings the narrative back to what is going on in the family and on the farm—for the unsalaried bishop had to earn his own living—and so conveys how her father's life is inextricably linked to family, land, and church. At times the factual information seems repetitive, though given the size of the book, many readers will likely read it a chapter or two at a time and find the repetition a handy refresher from previous reading sessions.

The contemporary reader may be somewhat baffled by some of the issues of concern to the church leaders at the time—cutting of hair, being kept home from school on Remembrance Day, dating restrictions, pianos in church, riding horses on the sidewalk in town, bridesmaids, white wedding dresses—but will certainly recognize the challenges of leadership in the face of ambition, social change, jealousies, gossip, fundamental differences in beliefs, and fear of losing the Mennonite faith and lifestyle to the world, all in the context of family.

A book like this raises as many questions as it answers, since it is impossible to tell all the stories that are alluded to. It would be interesting, for example, to read more about the minor characters, like the excommunicated church member who threatened Falk's life. What happened to him? Did he give up on church? Did he become a Russellite? Neufeld mentions her father's close relationship with Bishop David Schulz of the Bergthaler Church, and this made me wonder whether Falk sought council from his friend during the time his own ministers were trying to oust him. Schulz was an opponent of the co-operative movement in Southern Manitoba led by J.J. Siemens and I wondered as I read whether Falk shared Schulz's views.

A Prairie Pilgrim relates many human dramas and suggests many more and certainly provides much raw material for novelists and playwrights in the Falk clan who may wish to delve into their past. I understand that Wilhelm Falk, David Schulz, Dr. C.W. Wiebe, and J.J. Siemens grew up at the same time in the Schoenthal district. What happened on that school yard and how did that influence the actions of these four men when they became leaders in the community?

Armin Wiebe's grandmother grew up in Schoenthal and

would have known Wilhelm Falk and many of the players in this saga.

A popular Mennonite history

Suderman, David. *Why Little Abraham Came to Canada...* tracing the long journey of our Mennonite people. Self-published, 2008, 168 pages

Reviewed by Joanne Epp

David Suderman begins this historical account with the premise that “you don’t really know who you are until you know where you came from.” Suderman, now retired, is a former journalist who also worked with the Canadian Wheat Board for many years. The occasion for beginning this project was a family reunion in 2007, marking 130 years since his grandfather—the “little Abraham” of the title—came to Canada at the age of six. He addresses the book to his granddaughter who, he says, was his inspiration.

Suderman had three goals: to trace the Mennonite story from its beginning; to discover the context that allowed the Mennonite movement to survive; and, as so many others have done, to trace the story of his own family. The story of Suderman’s grandfather is woven into the account fairly early on, beginning with his great-great-great-great grandfather, Anton Sudermann, born in 1746 in Prussia. What makes the book interesting to those beyond Suderman’s relatives, however, is the fact that the family’s story takes up relatively little space. Much more of the book is devoted to the wider Mennonite story.

He begins broadly, with the story of Anabaptist origins in the 16th century, and gradually narrows the focus from all Mennonites to those who moved from Prussia to Russia, then to those who emigrated to Manitoba in the 1870s. Finally, near the end of the book, he tells us where his own grandfather ended up.

Suderman capably depicts the context in which Mennonites lived and explains how they were affected by the politics of the wider world. He explains, for instance, that the success of the Mennonite colonies in Russia owed a lot to the intervention of the Russian government, and he shows how the Crimean War led to

lasting changes for the Mennonites. He acknowledges that some of the historical details may not interest his granddaughter, but he includes them for the sake of fitting events into the big picture—and, not least, because he finds the history fascinating.

Suderman writes in an easy conversational style. The fact that he was, as he puts it, “woefully ignorant” of his roots when he began this project actually works in his favor. He shares with the reader his interest, surprise, and occasional dismay at what he finds in the historical texts, and he acknowledges that some matters still puzzle him.

In the course of his research Suderman encountered some unpleasant episodes. There was the long-standing division between the Frieslanders and the Flemish, which seems superficial now, but influenced people’s lives for many years. And there were the disputes over land distribution in the Russian colonies—disputes that went on for decades and involved much greed, intolerance, and bitterness. But Suderman simply says, “history won’t rewrite itself just because we wish it so,” and moves on with the story.

There are some problems with the production and editing of the book. The maps are poorly reproduced, leaving many place names illegible. The bibliography is sketchy, giving incomplete citations of several works and making no mention at all of the Web sites the author says he consulted, nor of magazine articles he quotes at some length.

This is mainly an account of the Mennonites’ journeys. Suderman does briefly outline the basic Anabaptist tenets early in the book, but from then on the narrative is mainly concerned with how and why Mennonites ended up where they did. To be sure, this is not unrelated to questions of faith; however, readers wanting a discussion of what Mennonites believe will have to look elsewhere.

But then, narrating that journey is the main reason for this book. And Suderman succeeds reasonably well. *Why Little Abraham Came to Canada* is popular history, offering a starting point for those who want a swift overview of the Mennonite story.

Although the title makes this sound like a children’s book, it would be most suitable for readers aged 12 and up.

Joanne Epp is a poet and reviewer living in Winnipeg. 

Contributors

Sean Braun is a writer from the Pembina Valley region who currently lives in Brandon, Manitoba. He plans to spend the next year completing a novel—a work initially conceived as a thesis project further to the completion of a Bachelor of Arts (honours) degree in English Literature at Brandon University—prior to entering a Master's program in Creative Writing.

Lora Jost is an artist, educator, and illustrator based in Lawrence, Kansas. She co-authored, with Dave Loewenstein, *Kansas Murals: A Traveler's Guide* (2006, University Press of Kansas), recognized as a Kansas Notable Book 2007 by the Kansas Center for the Book. She received

an M.F.A. from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1992, and a B.A. from Bethel College (N. Newton, Kansas) in 1988.

Sarah Klassen reads, writes, and sometimes teaches in Winnipeg. Her work has appeared in literary publications across Canada. She has also published several collections of poetry: *Simone Weil: Songs of Hunger, Love and Dangerous Elements*, and one collection of short fiction, *The Peony Season*. She has taught English language and literature in the public school system and in Lithuania, and English as a Second Language in Ukraine.

Continued from page 48

not one writer of Mennonite origin whose literary creative work was "illuminating on the subject of the Mennonite community on the prairies." They had to turn to me, who only lived in Manitoba for brief scattered periods of my adult life, for some kind of literary piece.

That's sad. After 100, after 180 years still not to have any writers of stature to help us see ourselves, to show our humanity, our particular resolutions of that humanity to the rest of the Canadian world. What the world's the matter with us? Are we ashamed? Is our living so little different from anyone else that we can so most willingly let it die in unexpressed anonymity?

Ninety-five percent of the people I meet know some Mennonite. I would judge that ninety percent of these believe only that we are quaintly old fashioned. Reporters, interviewers always have vague vibrations of Doukhobors, Hutterites in their voices when they talk to me. And it would, of course, never enter their minds to suspect me a Mennonite if I didn't write stories about them.

Though we may read more than we ever have (a natural result of western education) I don't believe that many of us think that imaginative works have any real purposes. Not the kind of real use an evangelistic sermon could have, or even an historic report. Our fiction,

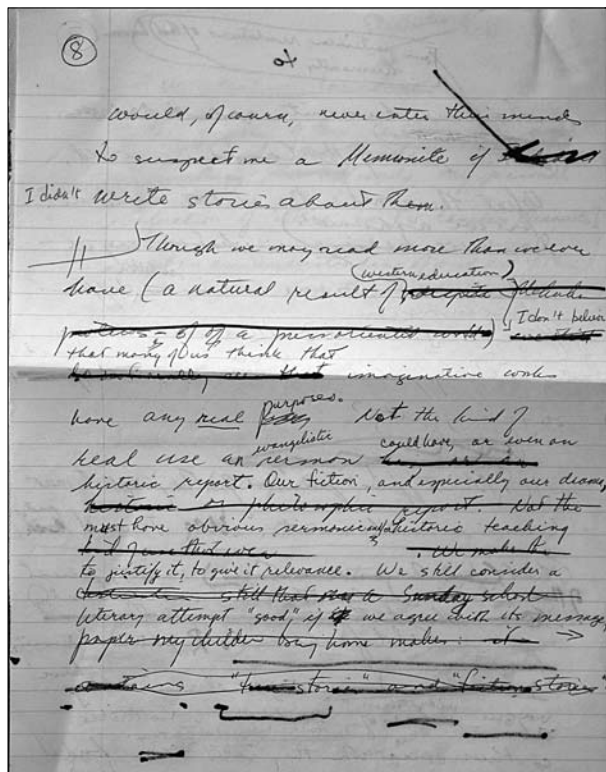
and especially our drama, must have obvious sermon, and/or historic teaching to justify it, to give it relevance. We still consider a literary attempt "good" if we agree with its message, if it gives us a smooth white image. We still try to fit writing into categories perpetuated

by the subtitles in some of our Sunday school papers: one piece is a "true story," another a "fiction story." (I have a long discussion lecture worked out on that topic, but only one Mennonite institution has asked me to give it). Incredible distinction!

It would make me very happy if I was too pessimistic here. It may be that the John Miller – Earl Stieler work in church drama at Waterloo (CM, Jan 22, 1971) is symptomatic of better things; it may be that writers like Len Neufeldt (in exile in Seattle), David Toews (in exile in Goshen?) are merely the visible tip of the iceberg; it may be that two young writers I have encountered in Edmonton,

who want honestly to explore their vision of the world, will do so on the basis of their experience, which is Coaldale and Steinbach Mennonite; it may be that these (and others whom I do not now know) are the artists who will lead us into greater understanding. For art is always beyond potential; always somewhere in the actuality of now.

In the meantime, we still wait. In hope. **R**



VOICELESS IN PARADISE

Rudy Wiebe

Originally written (but not published) for The Canadian Mennonite, Feb 19, 1971.



The purpose of this article is to give, in something less than a thousand words, my personal evaluation of "where we (ie. Canadian Mennonites) are at in our understanding and use of the arts—particularly writing and drama."

Let me, for this last issue of The Canadian Mennonite, propose a theory on our cultural history. Namely: if, on the basis of such peoples as the Irish, the Negroes, the Jews, we can say that mental and physical oppression eventually result in a significant literary expression, then the Mennonites must have been one of the freest, most liberated peoples on earth. For, like the Tahitians, of literature we have next to nothing.

Like the songs we sing, we have picked up bits and pieces of written literature from every culture we have touched in our wanderings, but we have of ourselves produced nothing.

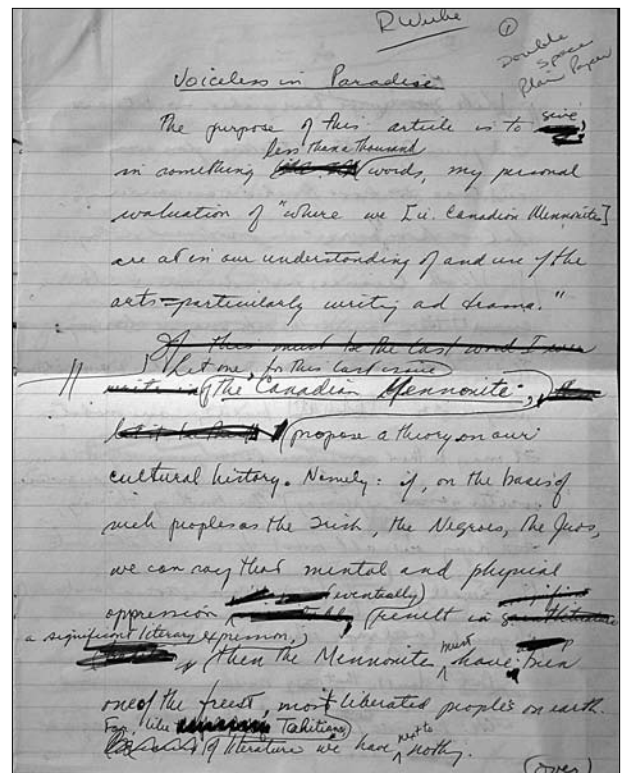
With leisure and education in Canada, our attitudes towards the arts may be changing. It may be that a ground swell of poets, novelists, and playwrights is building in our midst. It may be that somewhere some presently unknown writer is exploring, from a Mennonite Christian perspective, the birthing, the living, the dying we all must do, in relation to the small piece of Canadian social and physical landscape where we exist. But I doubt that very much. We have no longer an excuse of language, education, or poverty, but I still see no significant move toward expressing literarily our particular vision of following Jesus in the Canadian context. Mennonite in Canada have been, and remain, artistically voiceless.

For 17 years The Canadian Mennonite has had its pages open to poetry and fiction. Make a list of the writers you remember. I encountered several young writers when I edited my particular church's paper:

a girl in northern Saskatchewan, a boy in Manitoba, a young man in B.C. Are they still writing, eight years later? Who knows. But that is one of the first tests of the significant writer: he or she keeps working at it. No masterpiece ever leaps full grown out of anyone's head; we accept that in almost every field but writing. There, somehow, you do a thing once and it either proves you're great, or you stop. How foolish.

The Mennonites have been in Ontario since 1786; has one novel, one collection of poems been produced by them? The only items I recall are books written by outsiders about the "quaint" Mennonites. These books are of the pleasantly affirmative and superficial High Bright Buggy Wheels (Luella Creighton, 1951) type, where, as the Oxford Companion so sweetly puts it, "a Mennonite girl is weaned from the customs of her people." Custom only, from which to be weaned!

The Mennonites have lived in Manitoba since 1874; of all major white settlement in the North West, only the French Canadians and the Scots precede them. Yet when the magazine Mosaic wanted to do an issue on "Manitoba in literature" to mark the centennial in 1970, the editors apparently found



The two images here are the first & last pages of Rudy's handwritten first draft of "Voiceless in Paradise."