

9/2

S O P H I A

W I S D O M

*Say to Wisdom, "You are my sister."
Proverbs 7:4a*



*Marriage
and other worthy Endeavors*

VOLUME 9 ■ NUMBER 2

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SOPHIA

A Greek feminine noun associated with the biblical wisdom tradition, translated "wisdom" and personified in the book of Proverbs; equivalent in the New Testament to *logos*, the creative word that was with God in the beginning, creating and giving life to the world.

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Don't miss our next issue!

Remaining 1999 themes include:
October - Special issue from Ontario;
December - Volunteerism

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SOPHIA Mission Statement

Sophia offers a forum for Christian women to speak to one another about the joys and challenges of living faithfully in an uncertain, changing world. Its pages give voice to women's stories - their experiences in church and society, family and workplace, their aspirations and disappointments, their successes and failures. It invites expressions of joy and sorrow, concern and outrage. In doing so it hopes to affirm women in their quest for spiritual, emotional and physical wholeness and for the full expression of their gifts in all spheres of life.

Sophia was conceived and brought to birth by Mennonite Brethren women and celebrates Christian sisterhood. Its desire is to welcome differing voices. It hopes to challenge women and men of all ages as they live together in Christian community. The name SOPHIA (wisdom) expresses our desire to search and know the wisdom of God through the Scriptures and our experience as followers of Jesus Christ.

Sophia acknowledges the authority of God, the giver of wisdom, and of the sacred Scriptures, the story of God's dealings with women and men. "Oh the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" (Romans 11:33).

On the Cover: "Canadian Gothic: Working Together," by Lis Vensel



EDITORIAL

How Does Your Marriage Grow?

by Lori Matties

Recently I had a conversation with a friend who was trying to decide whether to marry the person with whom she was involved in a relationship. How did you know, she asked, that you had chosen the right person? I don't remember exactly what answer I gave her, but I probably mentioned the advice my mother gave me: if you have any doubts, don't marry. The fact is, after eighteen years of marriage, I'm not sure there is any foolproof advice about how to choose a spouse. It is not surprising to me that so many marriages fail, given the magnitude of expectations we place on romantic love. At the same time, we receive many messages through various media that teach us to replace everything that no longer satisfies with something new and better. Those messages put tremendous pressure on any commitments we make.

Our marriages, like our development as disciples of Christ, are meant to be a lifetime project. Somehow we do choose, and then we find ways to sustain our commitment to what we have chosen.

A metaphor that came to me not so long ago is that our spouse, and indeed whatever long-term commitments we make, are the soil in which God grows our character. These commitments are where we nurture roots and grow the flowers we learn to cherish through many stages. Here is where we work, with whatever tools and circumstances we have been given, to create beauty in cooperation with God, the Master Gardener. (Sorry for the gardening imagery – it's that time of year!)

Although I love my garden, it

does not always give me pleasure. There are times when I am discouraged by the sheer amount of work that is needed to keep down weeds, fill in empty spaces or divide overgrown perennials that are choking their neighbours. Sometimes a tall volunteer grows up right in front of a short plant, and I have to decide how and where to move it. Sometimes we go on a trip just when the raspberries are ripening and need to be picked every other day or they will rot. By the end of every summer I am exhausted by the volume of produce that needs to be preserved in some way. And yet, there are other times, like early spring, when the bulbs begin to bloom and the trees begin to blossom, or when a plant I have nurtured from seed grows into a stunning flower, that I am awed and humbled by its delight. After fourteen years of tending my garden, I am still fascinated by the mystery of how it grows.

I won't say my marriage is exactly like my garden, but I have learned a few lessons there. I can't make my spouse into something he is not, just as I can't grow flowers in zone 3 that are hardy only to zone 5. Sometimes I need to shift my behavior if it overpowers the relationship, just as I sometimes need to move perennials around until they find a spot that suits their growth habits. I need to find ways to nurture my relationship with my spouse just as I feed the soil of my garden with compost every year. Most of all, marriage, like gardening, is a long-term project that requires patience, trial and error and compassionate attention.

You'll find in this issue articles that reflect on marriage from various

vantage points. Each, I think, answers in some way the question of how we struggle to sustain and make meaning in the long-term project of the marriage commitment. And as for the "other worthy endeavors," here too you will find reflections on projects for the long term. We are an impatient people who nevertheless aspire to reach beyond our impatience to a greater depth of character. In your reading, may you find inspiration, tools for the task or simply delight.

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The Adventure of the Difficult Way

by Mary Ann Isaak

Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.
(MATTHEW 7:13-14)

For a long time, I have understood that the route to adventure and discovery meant choosing the most difficult pathway. But as I become responsible for more than just myself, I find it harder to take seriously the invitation to travel the most difficult way. Now I search for the most efficient way to organize a household, not the most exacting. If I am supposed to choose difficulty just because it's good for me, I admit to feeling rather tired with it all.

However, the choice that Jesus offers us in the conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount is not really about efficiency or about pain. Rather, Jesus is pointing to the road map and saying, "Look closely - the gravel road takes you along a way that leads to one destination and the Interstate heads in another direction altogether." Jesus doesn't say, "Choose the path that looks the most difficult." He says, "Choose the path that leads to life."

When I have a headache, what does it mean to choose life? If my headache prevents me from concentrating on what you are saying and if a Tylenol would help, then maybe I should choose life and take the Tylenol. Stoically refusing pain killers simply because that is the more difficult path does not automatically mean that I am choosing life. However, if my headache worsens daily,

and I take Tylenol to avoid the doctor and my fear of something worse, in that case, taking Tylenol means I am heading down the path of denial to destruction. Jesus says, "Choose life."

But even when we do choose life and want to travel the adventure of the narrow road, we're not always sure about the decisions along the way.

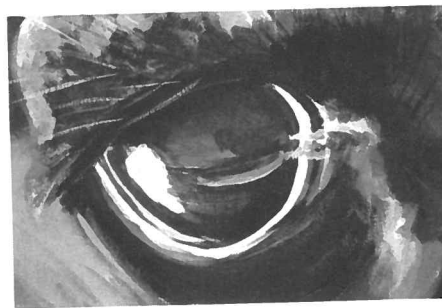
When I was sixteen, four teens drove from Manitoba to a youth retreat in Saskatchewan. We were confident we could do it. Then suddenly the blizzard hit and the road that had been so visible a few minutes before literally seemed to vanish. We quickly worked out a system. One person drove; another gave moral support by sitting right beside her. A third person held the passenger door open and got down to watch for the white line that marked the highway's edge, giving instructions like, "go left," "okay now right." And the fourth person prayed hard for all of us.

It seems to me that the road to life is sometimes like that highway to Hepburn. The going is fine for a while

and then suddenly all the markings disappear. And even though we keep inching forward, we can't be sure where the road is. Where is the road that leads to life when my schedule is overloaded with sincere demands on my time and emotions? Where is it when my job is filled with frustration or when every conversation I have with my child ends in an argument?

Jesus doesn't make it simple. First he says the road to life is difficult to travel. And then he says that the road to life is difficult to find! But he does give us a few travel pointers for the way.

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits.
(MATTHEW 7:16-20)



Jesus doesn't say, "Choose the path that looks the most difficult." He says, "Choose the path that leads to life."



The Eye of the Needle by Gail Marie Kehler. Gail Marie Kehler lives in St. Adolphe, Manitoba. She runs an art training school in her home, and has recently begun illustrating her husband's Mennonite heritage from his family photos.

Jesus says beware of false guides along the path. They promise to point out the way to life for us so we don't have to do the hard work of discernment.

It's like the story of the little gingerbread man that we tell our children. He outruns the hungry wife, husband, cat and dog only to be stopped short at the edge of the river. Here he is faced with the question of which way will lead to life. The fox comes along and says, don't bother to evaluate the situation. The way to life is just to jump on my back. I'll swim across the river and take you to the other side. If we surrender our responsibility to do the hard work of discernment, we may end up like the little gingerbread man – just a few crumbs stuck to the fox's smacking lips.

God's people have always needed to be concerned about false prophets. So the history of God's people from Old Testament times onward shows us how God has provided the guardrails on the roadway that leads to life. The Bible marks out the parameters within which the Christian community moves and imaginatively reenacts the choice of life in appropriate ways. This prophetic guidance within the community is tremendously creative and responsive to new situations, and somewhat unsettling as well. Those teachings that align with Scriptural norms will bear fruit and move us forward along the path of life.

Beware of false prophets. If their fruit is bad they are not leading along the road of life. But beware also that the reverse is not always true. No matter how good the fruit may be, it

may not be an indication of the road to life!

Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?" Then I will declare to them, "I never knew you: go away from me, you evildoers."
(MATTHEW 7:21-23)

No matter how useful the Bible is in describing the way for God's people, it will not do to leave the work of discernment to the mere repetition of a formula, even a biblical one. Formulas may be

Continued on page 9 ►

Mengistu and Minale, whose families in Ethiopia planned their marriage, are among the happiest of the couples I know. I came to know Mengistu as a complex and very special person and have been enriched by his and Minale's friendship.

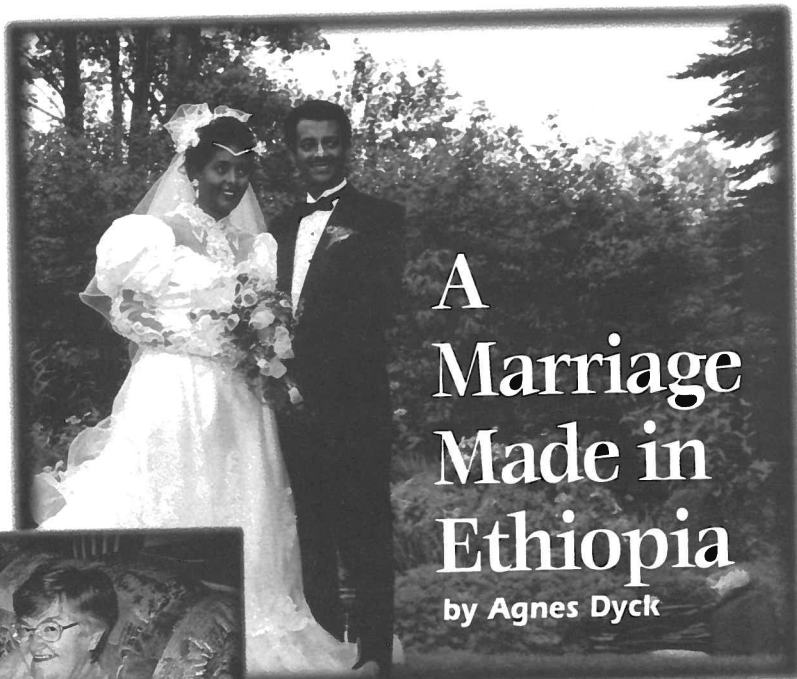
Mengistu Abebe Tekleyohanes was referred to me as an ESL (English as a Second Language) student by Nettie Dueck, who has assisted new Canadians. From the start I was impressed with Mengistu's eagerness to learn English and his persistence in pursuing his educational goals despite the long hours at a factory job. His success in achieving 301 English credit made us both proud.

As we became better acquainted, I was given glimpses of the turmoil and unrest in his beloved country, Ethiopia. It was obvious to me that he longed for his homeland and his family, but it was also clear that he could not return to Ethiopia. Sometimes he expressed his frustration at the different customs here in Canada. He demonstrated Ethiopian respect for older people in always courteously asking about my elderly mother before we began our English lesson. Ethiopian hospitality and generosity are legendary, and the strangeness of our ways required major adjustments on his part. However, he repeatedly claimed he preferred our cold weather to a hot climate.

As a teenaged political prisoner Mengistu had seen the most horrific side of human nature. But he also spoke highly of the close comradeship and support of his fellow prisoners, many of whom were older than he was. He described the Scrabble games with letters made of bread, the story-telling and the way various experts shared their knowledge with the others. Those were unforgettable times for the prisoners, he said.

Upon his release, he escaped from Ethiopia by hiding in a nomadic tribe whose language was unfamiliar but who understood and sympathized with his plight. Eventually he was sponsored by the Kleefeld Evangelical Mennonite Church to emigrate to Canada.

Back in Ethiopia, his family, discovering his whereabouts and realizing that he was alive and well, began to plan with the help of another family to provide a bride for Mengistu. The families knew each other, but Mengistu and Minaleshoo Kassa had never met, so they were both contacted to see whether they would be willing to marry. They spoke on the phone in order to become better acquainted.



Agnes with Salome, Ezra and Bethel.

I have not forgotten the shy way in which Mengistu showed me a tiny photo of beautiful Minale and said he hoped she would be able to come to Canada to marry him. We prayed together, and in a month she was here in Canada!

This twenty-one-year-old woman, travelling alone to marry a man whom she had never seen, impressed everyone she met with her courage and determination. On her arrival they were immediately married in a civil ceremony and then one year later, on August 29, 1992, the Kleefeld Church staged

a public affirmation of their marriage. Before the celebration, the wedding party and I toured some shops in search of a wedding gown for Minale. We had almost given up when Mengistu, pointing to a gown, said, "Take this one!" Minale tried on the frilliest, most elaborate gown and glowed. Later, she mailed the gown to Ethiopia so her relatives could enjoy it there.

Now they have a four-year-old daughter, Salome, and twins, Ezra and Bethel, born December 24, 1998. They are active in the Ethiopian community and meet for church services in Calvary Temple on Sunday afternoons. They are praying that Minale's mother will be able to come for an extended visit.

His family, discovering his whereabouts and realizing that he was alive, began to plan to provide a bride for Mangistu.

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Agnes Dyck is a member of Sophia's editorial committee. Active as a teacher of English in various venues, she is a member of McIvor Ave. MB Church in Winnipeg.

Me?

by Doreen Martens

SNAP

My Fingers?

"Oh, Mom's in a happy mood," Jeff remarked to the kids one sunny Saturday afternoon. "She's snapping her fingers."

Puzzled, I looked down at my hands and realized to my surprise that I had, in fact, been strolling happily through the house, snapping away on both barrels.

"Mom always does that when she's feeling good."

"I do?"

"Yup. Snappy-snappy," he said with a grin.

The stuff you have left to learn about your spouse after thirteen years of marriage sometimes pales beside the stuff you have left to learn about yourself.

The big issues of life – values, faith, lifestyle – we pretty much cleared up years ago. It's the tiny things, those weird little quirks that can either endear you forever or drive you crazy in an hour, that seem to loom large once you've been together long enough to wear out your first set of small appliances.

When I ask what drives him crazy about me, Jeff chivalrously claims to have forgotten any oddities I might have had years ago. But after pondering this unusual opportunity for a minute, his memory suddenly improves.

"Oh, there's the closet thing," he says, smirking. He reminds me that we have two equal-sized closets, but his is half-useless because of poorly placed duct work that makes it impossible to hang clothes on one side. Yet during a recent bout of houseguestitis, it was he, a champion of the small but fully utilized wardrobe, who quickly found space for our stream of visitors to hang their things. It's been eight years, and two moves, since I've gathered the energy – or is it the moral courage? – to glean a donation for the thrift shop from my side of the rack. So many things to alter! So much nice fabric that could be made into something else! So many fine antiques waiting for fashion to cycle back! So little time!

Such a packrat! he adds.

He's warming to the task now. He mentions my theory of relativity when it comes to time – that is, the belief that time expands infinitely, relative to the closeness of a deadline. Got an hour? Five minutes? Squeeze in one more thing. (I can't argue with this one – he's got too many of my past and present editors on his side.)

In our first few years together, we rarely got to anything on time. But in negotiating between my principles of

time management and his (which dictate that you must arrive everywhere early, even if it means catching your hostess in the shower because you've come at 7:55 when every sensible invitee knows the 8:00 party won't really start till 8:30), we've managed to drift toward the central time zone.

He senses the hackles rising, so he tries a compliment. He points out that he doesn't often have to whack his way through a jungle of drying pantyhose in the bathroom anymore. That really drove him nuts.

Sorry, guy, that's just because, in shrugging off the discomforts of fashion, I've mostly switched to sensible long skirts I can wear knee-highs with.

Oh.

Of course, he is not without his own quirks. It drives me crazy, for example, that he likes to stroll outside to water the garden in his socks. White socks. He does more laundry than I do (Jeff's aside: *more* in the same sense that Wayne Gretzky has scored *more* NHL career goals than Whoopi Goldberg). So it's not that I bear the burden of grass-stain eradication. But I can't help screeching, inside if not outside, whenever I see this travesty of good sense and

moral uprightness. Isn't there something in the Epistles about this?

Then there's what Jeff refers to as a normal approach to health care, which is, and I quote, "No pain should be endured by any human being at any time for any reason without immediately seeking medical attention." I call him a hypochondriac. He swears that if

I were somehow impaled on an iron grate in a horrible accident, my response to his entreaties would be, "Why go to the doctor? What's the doctor going to do about it?"

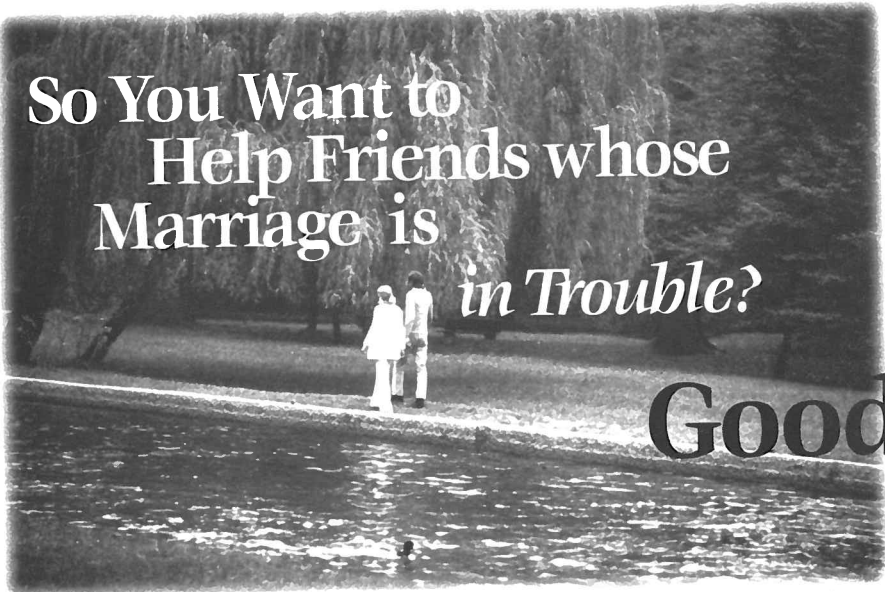
Sometimes I've pondered the meaning of these gaps in our perspective on the world. Is this what that notion of two-becoming-one means? Do we keep each other more whole and sane by balancing our oddities? Or are we just destined to become a weirder package as we grow old together?

I don't know, but I'm willing to bet the secret of happiness in a fifty-year marriage to a very strange person (which the other partner always is) has to be learning to ignore what you can, and to laugh at what you can't.

I'm going to try laughing more often. Snappy-snappy.

Doreen Martens is a frequent contributor to *Sophia*. She, her husband, Jeff, and two children live in Orange, California.

It's the tiny things, those weird little quirks that can either endear you forever or drive you crazy in an hour.



So You Want to Help Friends whose Marriage is in Trouble?

Good!

By Mary and John Regehr

Caring friends are in an enviable position to provide preventive input and to help a floundering couple negotiate early rough spots. What can be of inestimable value is the formation of a small group of couples who meet regularly over a period of time for the express purpose of being open with each other about their marriages. An unhappy couple can find help in discovering that early difficulties are quite normal and do not spell doom. By observing others, the struggling couple can find helpful ways out of loggerhead disagreements or can learn from others the gentle grace of becoming more realistic and less demanding about expectations.

Such a group structure seems unrealistic? Move in to help anyway. Friends can recognize early signs of disillusionment even before the hurt gets expressed openly in sarcastic put-downs. We recognize disappointment even when the couple is still intent on masking their unhappiness and keeping up appearances. Sometimes the immediate help a hurting couple needs is quite practical, like a babysitter to allow them an evening or a weekend by themselves. Help may be a timely word to correct flawed thinking or a suggestion for alternative responses to the partner. Most friends are very hesitant to be direct, let alone directive, in personal matters. After all, we may be told to butt out. However, if the nudge is administered in a spirit of care and not of judgment, chances are good that it will be received, perhaps even with gratitude.

What is important is that friends provide a place of safety for the couple, and for each partner, individually. We

provide safety when we listen with the heart, listen without judgment, without quick rebuttal, without hastily taking sides with one against the other. Yet in time friends move beyond listening. We help the couple face the pain they experienced and inflicted, help them deal with their fear and anger and move on to repentance and healing. In time they can move on to forgiveness and reconciliation.

Friends who want to help ought to be aware that marriages normally move through quite predictable stages. Crisis points, therefore, signal a necessary movement into a new phase. Con-

flict can be the agent of choice to make it happen. Thus, friends do not panic, but move in to assist the couple in making the necessary move, which may be either a minor mid-course correction or a major re-structuring.

It will be especially difficult to relate to a couple when at one of these crisis points they have already dug themselves into bunkers from which each sees the other as the enemy. They are entrenched in the way they think, feel and act, and are unwilling to change. They have lost the passion to make the marriage succeed. Since they see the present situation as mostly painful, the thought of leaving feels very inviting. It seems to promise freedom, and the hurting partner cannot see beyond that short-term relief. Friends are not helpful, however, when they get in over their heads in the conflict of the couple, and so they do well to encourage the couple to seek professional counselling. And faithful friends will stay with it until the troubled couple follows through.

Yet this is not to say that friends ought then to take their hands off. True friends remain deliberate and purposeful. The practical help may now include care for the children, who will be deeply affected, even trauma-

tized, by the parents' hostility. Friends can provide a place where the children can feel safe and can speak about their fear and their feelings of guilt.

Friends are put into a particularly difficult situation when they discover that serious abuse is part of the marital equation. We may need to see to the safety of the partner and the children if they are at risk. Where necessary we may need to help plot a course of escape. Certainly friends

What is important is that friends provide a place of safety for the couple, and for each partner, individually.

won't insist that the partner at risk remain in the place of danger. At the same time, friends remain open to hearing the entire story, not only the one told by the partner who claims abuse. Especially in our era of zero tolerance, it is possible for the one partner to be abusive while the law is mobilized to make the other out to be the villain. Either way, friends do not abandon either partner. Both will need healing, and so both will need to face their wrongs and become converted, whether or not the marriage survives.

Friends face a dilemma when the couple separates. It is best initially to remain positive and optimistic. The separation may be the outcome of an acute and temporary crisis in which neither partner is willing to risk bridging. Friends can help the couple see such a separation as a wake-up call. However, friends need to be careful not to push for reuniting too quickly. A separation usually indicates a longer history of pain and anger, and true reconciliation requires a thorough treatment of the underlying fear and violation. Both partners require strong friendships during this time, in particular friends who do not simply support the anger and reinforce the complaints but who can be accepting of the person, yet can challenge too. Since both partners were acting together to create the relationship they have developed, both will need to make significant changes if a reconciliation is to be genuine and lasting. The friends need to remain steady and not panic, and not lose sight of the possibility of a happy outcome.

Churches would do well to select and commission couples who have the skill and interest to be shepherds of married couples. As representatives of the church these would have the privilege of making shepherding house-calls. When hurting couples learn to trust this shepherd pair, they may reveal things they have concealed even from their friends. This shepherd pair will know when it is appropriate to deal with issues with the partners together, and when it would be more useful to talk woman to woman and man to man. Troubled couples easily get locked into protective stances, and the warm and trusting relationship with a same-sex care-giver can help soften the spirit, alleviate the pain and re-awaken the commitment.

.....
John and Mary Regehr work as counsellors at Recovery of Hope, a Christian marriage and family counselling centre in Winnipeg. They attend McIvor Ave. MB Church in Winnipeg.

From the Source

Continued from page 5

helpful, but they are not foolproof guides to life.

Jesus gives an example. The formula says, "Good trees bear good fruit. Bad trees bear bad fruit." But in the next breath Jesus blatantly contradicts this formula. There are people who do bear good fruit – they prophesy, cast out demons, perform deeds of power – and still they are not on the path to life. Calling Jesus "Lord" and doing deeds "in Jesus' name" does not necessarily lead to life. When a scriptural formula is applied without true depth or discernment, it is dangerous and deceptive.

Jesus says, "The road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it." It requires discernment. Prophets aren't always trustworthy. Formulas aren't foolproof. But the adventure is not hopeless.

The solid foundation on which to choose life is not found in *saying* accurate and orthodox things about God. Neither is the solid foundation based on *hearing* Jesus' words, listening, studying, and pondering the biblical norms. Choosing life is anchored in *doing* what we say and in *doing* what we know. In other words, to choose life is to submit to God's rule by gathering around Jesus, together in the community of faith, and discerning the path that leads to life – one step at a time!

But the inescapable choice that Jesus puts before us today is not a call to live more heroically than others. Jesus is pointing to the miracle that occurred in history – the arrival of God's reign – a reality not brought on by human strength but by something really quite unstoppable and gracious. The choice of life is guided by the solid foundation of the true miracle of God's in-breaking reign. The radical pursuit of Jesus' way is driven by our absolute fascination with the gift of a new possibility for human community.

Unlike the various paths that claim to yield life, Jesus' contrast-society is not centred on efficiency, discipline, moralism or purity. Instead, it originates in the reign of God that empowers us for discipleship. The promise comes before responsibility.

Jesus teaches us that the road to life is difficult to travel. But the *gift* of life puts the difficulty in perspective. Jesus tells us that the road to life is difficult to find. But the *gift* of life helps us navigate the obscure sections. So the road is there. And it leads to life. Life now. Abundantly. Life eternal. Abundantly.

.....
Mary Ann Isaak is currently serving as a pastor at College Community Church – Mennonite Brethren in Clovis, California. This article is taken from a sermon she preached with her husband, Jon, at McIvor Ave. MB Church in Winnipeg in the summer of 1998.

It's About Time

by Donna Neufeld

Those who think a couple can never have too much time together have obviously never done it. They may have sipped the water in artificially-controlled leisure situations, but Honey, they've never swum in the sea.

Too much time apart seems like a more obvious hardship; but many women steel themselves for that ordeal by turning flesh to iron.

I've been at both ends of the continuum. Climb aboard the pendulum and share my journey as we swing first to one extreme:

(Tick tick tick...) The first time he leaves me is for the money. Eight weeks of overseas employment will go a long way toward easing our debts. Eight weeks of single parenting for me: three preschool children and three months' pregnant.

Time takes on a surreal quality, as I enter my own time zone: Mommy Standard Time. Meals ebb and flow around kids' hunger zones rather than working hours. It's strangely liberating.

In my nauseated pregnant state, food also becomes surreal. One of the things I can actually keep down is a Sausage and Egg McMuffin with Sprite, a la "Golden Arches." I don't realize how numerous our visits are until my two-year-old girl puts together the stories she hears repeatedly at home with the visage she sees most regularly: she christens Ronald McDonald "Jesus."

In another space and time, the pendulum swings to the opposite extremity:

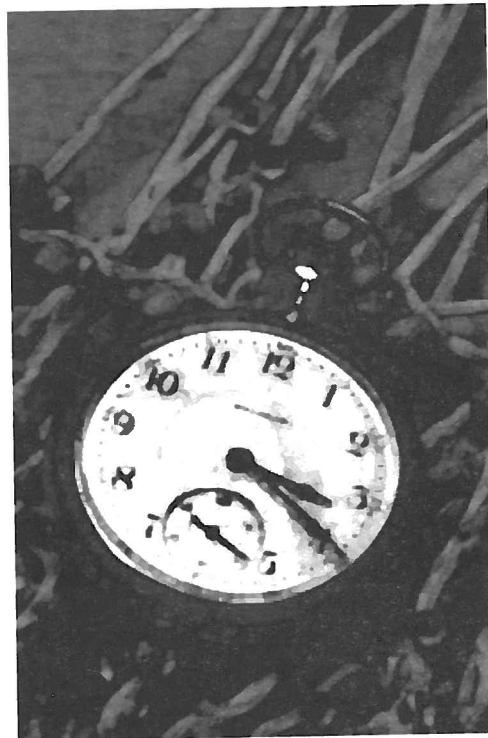
(Tock tock tock...) The man in my house is a self-employed carpenter; work disappears every winter. After the first few weeks, it feels as if we're breathing each other's air.

The small things drive me crazy.

"See!" my husband proclaims with a sweeping gesture toward the bathroom cupboard. "On this shelf are all the

medicines that need to be taken internally. And over here are all the medicinal treatments for external problems.

"You," he fixes me with an accusing gaze, "had them all mixed together!" Oh Lord: how long will it be *this* time?



Time takes on a surreal quality, as I enter my own time zone: Mommy Standard Time.

(Tick tick tick...) It's all in the pacing. I don't count "eight weeks away": I measure it in weekends.

"Only six more Saturdays and Daddy will be home." I rediscover girlfriend stuff: going out to the cabin together, catching supper at the food court while our kids swarm about. I spend evenings on the phone with whoever is free to chat because, after all, no one in the world has asked me how MY day went.

My two-year-old daughter begins to search among the sea of grown-ups at church, fastening herself onto the blue-jeaned leg of any man she finds, trying to recapture something she doesn't even know she's lost.

Only five more Saturdays to go...

(Tock tock tock...) Money pressures increase: the marriage is a pantomime of blame and accusation.

I take a part-time job. He spends his time in the kitchen, re-rolling the bags of bulk spices.

"See? Now the English labels are facing out; a person can easily find what they want. You had them all with the French on the outside!"

To think I minded an ocean being between us.

(Tick tick tick...) He's coming home.

Household disorder (If you don't make your bed, and no one is there to see it, is it still messy?) is pulled into line. I buy a new outfit and take a whole day to vacuum the car.

An adjustment phase will inevitably follow: I'll begrudgingly alter my parenting stride to include another opinion; and we'll struggle through the Budget and Bill debate.

Questions Counsellors Never Ask ... But Really Should

But for now, life's impending realities are dimmed by the need to see him, smell him; to wake up beside his sleep-warm body. The long separation is almost worth the heady electricity of that first touch.

(Tock tock tock...) It takes me five dry winters to clue in: this too will pass. Work will resume, bills will get paid; we will start liking each other again.

Unemployment needn't have cost us so much but I repeatedly sold our family peace and wholeness for a handful of paychecks.

This year, we will fight off despair. Wooden spoons are our weapons of choice: we will throw a party: a huge, wonderful, feast of a party.

A whirlwind of menus and prices and guest-lists descends upon us. Our slim food budget has to be stretched to test new recipes, so the children launch into a strange diet of epicurean delights alternating with pancakes and porridge. (There are no complaints.)

We ask participants to cover the cost of their food. A friend generously offers her tea room as our venue. The gaunt, depressing weeks are lost in a flurry of centerpieces and party-favours.

So it is that forty friends are seated to wine and dine at a sumptuous five-course Valentine's meal. I doubt that many know the path that led us here; the air is resonant with hope and beauty.

We exhausted ourselves, and we made no money.

But who's to say we didn't profit?

.....
Donna Neufeld is enjoying a period of relative stability as a mother of four elementary-school children in Winnipeg.

Affianced Women everywhere, beware! There are some subjects never breathed in premarital counselling that will touch the very essence of your existence the instant you say: "I will." Sure, any one can see the big issues coming: "Where will we live? Will we have kidlets?" yadda yadda yadda. But it's the nitty-gritty "Who-put-the-crumbs-in-the-butter?" questions that a wise woman understands to hold the key to real domestic bliss. Donna Neufeld helpfully compiled the following list to lead you and your betrothed through these crucial issues.

How do you eat sunflower seeds? Where do you eat them?

What happens to toe-nails after you clip them?

What do you mean by: "sleeping in"?

Two words: Lawn Ornaments. (Do anything for you?)

Does Ketchup belong in the cupboard or fridge?

How many ply does toilet paper have to be?

How do you feel about re-adjusting the driver's seat every time you enter the car?

Do you want one of those beady-seat-things on the driver's seat?

Sunday afternoons are best spent _____

The one night of the week I'm dying to go out is _____

I don't care where we cut corners, just as long as we have enough money for _____

Saturday mornings are meant for _____

A real man's job around the house is to _____

It's absolutely disgusting when people _____

Can one person clip coupons and articles out of the paper before the other has finished reading it?

If you see me shaving my legs, will all the mystery be gone from our relationship?

If I don't shave my legs, will all the mystery be gone from our relationship?

Do you rent videos with the word "Creatures" in the title?

Can anything hang from our car's rearview mirror?

Must I call you from the video store before I choose the movie?

Evening snacks, two words: sweet or salty?

Do we shop on Sunday?

Can I leave the plastic covering on our lampshades?

Do you brush your teeth before or after breakfast?

Does the toilet paper come off the roll from the top or the bottom?

How do you evaluate the comfort of a couch?

Do you sleep with the covers neatly tucked in, or do you have to kick them loose before you fall asleep?

What magazines will we subscribe to?

How long is too long on the Internet?

Can I read with the light on when you want to go to sleep?

Who gets the clock radio on their side of the bed?

What happens to the juice in the grapefruit after you've eaten the segments?

What is the ideal number of friends to have over in the evening?

Will you share the remote?

Can I use your razor?

Glimpses of Personal Healing

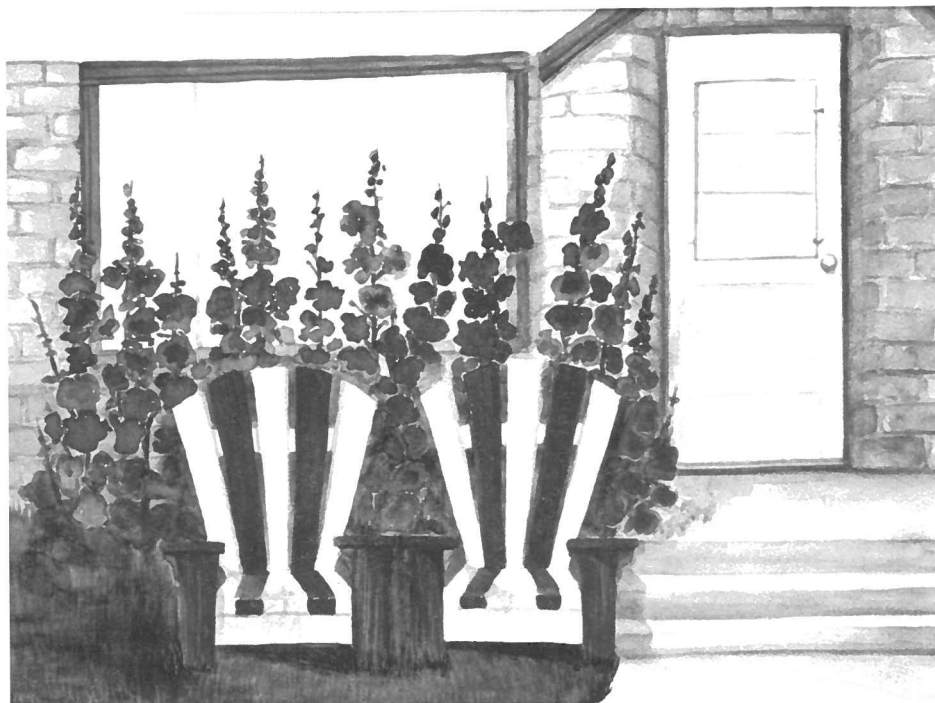
by Elfrieda Duerksen

The following is a reflection by Elfrieda as part of a series on healing, given at River East MB Church, Winnipeg, this spring. Elfrieda's story is about healing, but it also reflects a stage in her marriage through which she and her husband, Dave, have had to grow.

Before I speak about healing, allow me to make a few comments about woundedness and brokenness. In late winter of 1991 I was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis, a disease that is affecting my hands and feet in particular, causing pain and deformity, and appearing in other joints as well. The loss of health is a big loss. Then in fall of that year, seven-and-a-half years ago now, my husband, Dave, suffered a debilitating stroke. This was very traumatic. Dave did experience healing in some areas, but many losses remain. After some time, I could no longer care for him at home, and he had to move into a care facility. I continue to find it deeply painful to see him locked in a severely handicapped body with the total inability to express himself in writing and extremely limited in speech when ideas and words were his life. And he has many thoughts and feelings he would so much like to express. For us to live in different places in very different worlds creates much stress.

Healing is happening, but it is slow as certain stresses are ongoing. Dave is also weakening. Although I believe that God is the ultimate healer, I know too that he uses people and situations, often in mysterious ways. My rheumatologist has helped me not only with medications but also to face and accept this intruder who seems to have taken up permanent residence in my body – and then to adjust to a drastic change in lifestyle. The result: greater contentment and peace.

The second Sunday after Dave's stroke was Thanksgiving. I was drawn to attend the service but fearful to go. How would people respond? Would I sit in the same area as I had with Dave? I was not the same person; I felt lost; I had become so vulnerable. I decided to go. The first per-



The Pelargoniums by Gail Marie Kehler

son I met greeted me with a warm smile, "Oh, Elfrieda, I am so glad to see you." What a welcome!

As others joined me in my usual pew, I knew, "This is my faith community, this is my church home." It was an uplifting service in the midst of pain. I also knew that I could not continue my journey alone. And so I have shared often, and the response has been overwhelming love and support for both of us. Much healing has taken place in this community, and it continues. We are deeply grateful.

Healing has also happened through the ongoing caring of our children and grandchildren as well as many friends, and through authors of books and articles, Scripture, prayer, nature, music, silence, times spent with God.

A prayer I have often repeated is, "God, protect me from self-pity." God is gracious to me by giving me the freedom to enter the joy of others and to cele-

brate with them. This is bonding and healing.

Healing has also come to me by identifying with the pain of another. Since I hurt, I would like to ease the pain of the other by listening and feeling some of that pain. I hope that in some way I can lighten the other's load even a little. At the same time my burden lightens as I find that the other's suffering is usually greater than mine, and I become deeply grateful for the bountiful blessings I receive

*God sanctifies pain and
it becomes a sacred trust.*

daily. As an added bonus, a bond develops in sharing hurts, and I have found a new friend.

The concept of boundaries has become a special focus for me. A boundary is an internal property line or fence, not to exclude others but to set limits to protect myself; to balance giving of myself and providing nurture for myself, and not to become self-centered. A boundary defines freedom. In protecting myself, I am free to give my best to Dave, to my family, to others. To find that invisible shifting line is a daily challenge but rewarding. It brings healing.

I am so grateful for continued healing. The sting, the sharp edge, of the trauma is gone. At the same time I believe that the pain of these losses will always be part of me – but I find that God sanctifies pain and it becomes a sacred trust. Thus loss and pain become the fertile soil for the sprouting and growth of new life and deep joy – a gift, a treasure indeed.

A few special verses from Psalm 118: "Let those who fear the Lord say: 'His love endures forever.' In my anguish I cried to the Lord, and he answered by setting me free. The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. ...The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation." (vv 4-6a, 14 NIV).

And a concluding thought for our journey: Wholeness, completeness, will come. It will come. As the children of God we are looking forward to that land with the river of the water of life where the trees have healing leaves, where there will be no losses or pain and where together we will worship freely our God and Saviour.

.....
 Elfrieda and Dave Duerksen live in Winnipeg, where they are members of River East MB Church.

by Dora Dueck

A Certain Woman

On an autumn day beginning to gather in stubble its winter snow, its safe cold for winter death, a certain woman stands alone

on the field. She struggles; her knees are bending as paper under swift brilliant fingers of fear and the pronouncements of

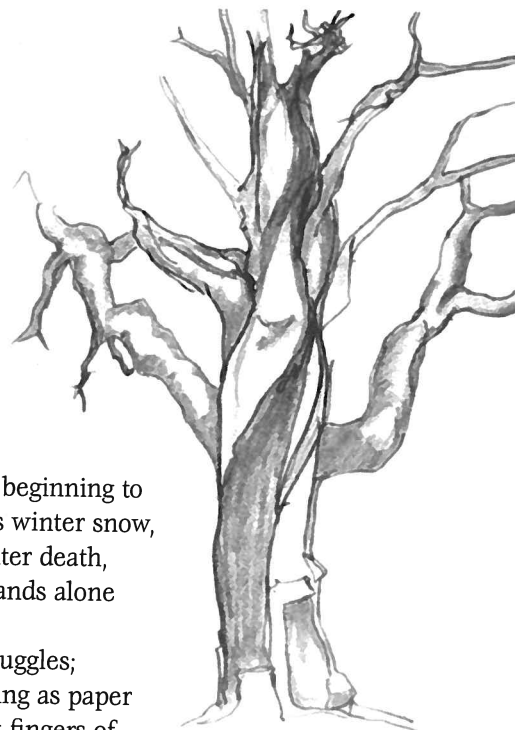
law and tradition, fingers skilled at folding her in shapes of flowers, beasts, birds, weapons, any bended folded other thing. Her limbs

have no strength and even her voice is a page without consonants, a whisper *I am not paper, but the tree from which you take me* The prairie

is empty of past or person, the air too thin to lean on. She wishes to crumble, flatten, breathe familiar dust. Then the wind is angry and speaks:

Stand, wavering stalk. You are born already; your seeding is not in falling and bowing. You have roots. Let memory be a mirror. The woman

tries to believe the wind. She lets the snow anchor her feet. She remembers they are beautiful. She knows they are warm with the weight of her leaves.

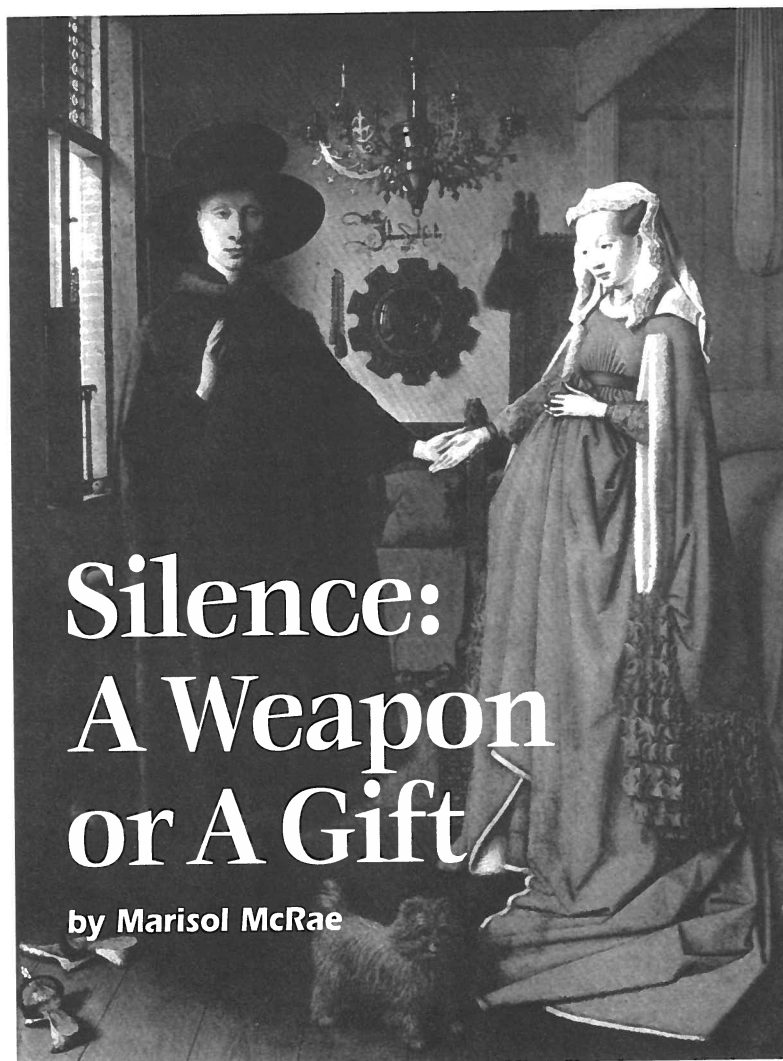


"Bang!" Doors slam as Jack and Jill* come out of their red Honda. Jack walks briskly toward the counselling office – shoulders stiff, chin up, eyes fiery. Jill follows ten feet behind – shoulders limp, head down, eyes lost in empty space. They sit on opposite sides of the room looking away from each other. The tension between them rises until it suffocates. They huff and puff a hundred breaths a minute. For fifteen, they utter not a word. Yet their silence screams a thousand. It pierces the ears of their hearts. It deafens.

Like a weapon, this silence threatens. Jack and Jill use it against each other to punish an offense they fear to confront or to keep the upper hand in their relationship. They also use it to play safe – holding back thoughts and feelings that, if shared, might build bridges rather than carve out chasms in each other's hearts. They hide behind defensive walls and stay out of each other's space for fear of being hurt yet again. And as they hide and keep distance, past and present wounds fester, filling their hearts with unrest.

Like a weapon, this silence threatens.

around these noises and more. They enable our preoccupation with the urgent. Left unchecked, this preoccupation eats away at our ability to be present to ourselves and to each other. Our hands touch but our hearts grow far apart. We lose sight of that which truly matters. Before long, this unrest explodes, resulting in even more violation of that inner space where trust ought to dwell.



The Marriage of Giovanni Arnolfini and Jeanne Cenami, 1434 by Jan van Eyck

Silence: A Weapon or A Gift

by Marisol McRae

We become as Jack and Jill – unaware of how our unrest controls us. Numbed by fear, we let noises shield us; first from ourselves and then from others. We live as old creatures rather than as ones made new by the shed blood of Christ. We refuse to bother with the grace that seeks to free us to trust that we are loved, and in that love to show a vulnerability that says, "because I love you." Rather, we waste time and energy reacting to most trivial incidents as though we were being attacked. We build walls around us. And we tumble down the hill of life lonely, broken and scarred.

Jack and Jill sit uncomfortably in the silence that separates them. As I wait for their cold war to thaw, my

heart cries, "Lord, let me hear their pain. Let them hear each other's. Redeem this silence."

Christ uses silence to reveal the depth of his love for us. He remained silent when the chief priests accused him of many crimes before Pilate (Mk. 15:3-5). He did not defend his actions, as doing so would have prevented him from atoning for ours. The seven last words he uttered as he hung dying on the cross stand out because they are framed by the silence of his passion (Mk. 15:34; Lk. 23:34, 43, 46; Jn. 19:26-28, 30). While Jack and Jill's silence is driven by fear, Christ's is empowered by love. As he took on himself all the pain, scars and sins of humanity, he communed with the Father. Upon this silent communion rests his victory over fear, sin and death.

"Stand silent, know that I am God," I hear (Ps. 46:10). I wait some more. "Lord, liberate them from their fear. Free their hearts to trust." Jack and Jill let angry words fly. I listen. I help them hear themselves and each other. Then, they breathe slowly, deeply. Tears flow. Love prevails. At the end of the hour, "I'm sorry," they tell each other. They smile

through their tears, make another appointment and leave.

Knowing that the Father speaks in gentle whispers (see 1 Kings 19:12), Christ calls us to take time out from external noises and internal unrest. He invites us to order our lives by making room for his gift of silence – minute moments as well as extended periods of it. In this silence, we become acutely aware of our humanness. We learn to embrace our pain, our scars and our sins. We face the passion of our lives – its darkest times – head on. These are the times when God chooses, often in the midst of seeming absence, to carry out purifying work in the recesses of our hearts. Silence moves us from loneliness to solitude, from fearing our aloneness to resting alone in God.

Silence keeps us centred. It allows us to let go of our defensive stance so that we may be present to each other as Christ always is to us. This state of attention frees us to choose to be vulnerable, thereby opening inner spaces so that our hearts may hear the birthing of God's serenade. And hearing thus, we may jump up and dance in celebration of the dawning of God's love. God says, "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness" (Jer. 31:3 NIV). Silence draws us to God's love. It sets the stage for us to bask in it, to rest in the confronting yet comforting embrace of God's presence, to pray.

* Not the names of actual people, but representative of many men and women who struggle with the discipline of silence.

.....
 Marisol McRae is a counsellor who works with individuals, couples and families in Surrey and Langley, B.C. She is most interested in ways to create heart-space for prayer. She and her husband, Bob, are members of Fraser Heights Community Church.

The Mystery of Marriage: As Iron Sharpens Iron

.....
 by Mike Mason (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1985).

Reviewed by Debra Fieguth

British Columbia author Mike Mason wrote this book as a relative newlywed and a young man in the mid-1980s. Its enduring popularity and the fact that it was reprinted recently in a beautiful gift edition speak for themselves about the writer's skill.

Mason writes with passion, insight beyond his experience and years – theologian James Packer admits in the forward that he never would have encouraged a young husband to write about marriage – and a keen understanding of Jesus' vital place in a Christian union.

He has a love of language and imagery, and a quirky way of twisting his metaphors. Marriage, he declares, is a trap. But it is a trap of pure love, he hastens to add. "The love is so pure, so intense, that it can be like a big iron gate that clangs shut behind us. And there we are. Imprisoned, of our own free will, in the dungeon of marriage" (p. 50).

He sometimes exaggerates to make a point. The common wedding ritual of lighting a central candle with two others and then blowing out the two is one of touching simplicity, he says, but it has little to do with reality: "It is a different matter when the flame that must be extinguished is no lambent flicker of a candle, but the blistering inferno of self-will and independence" (p. 72).

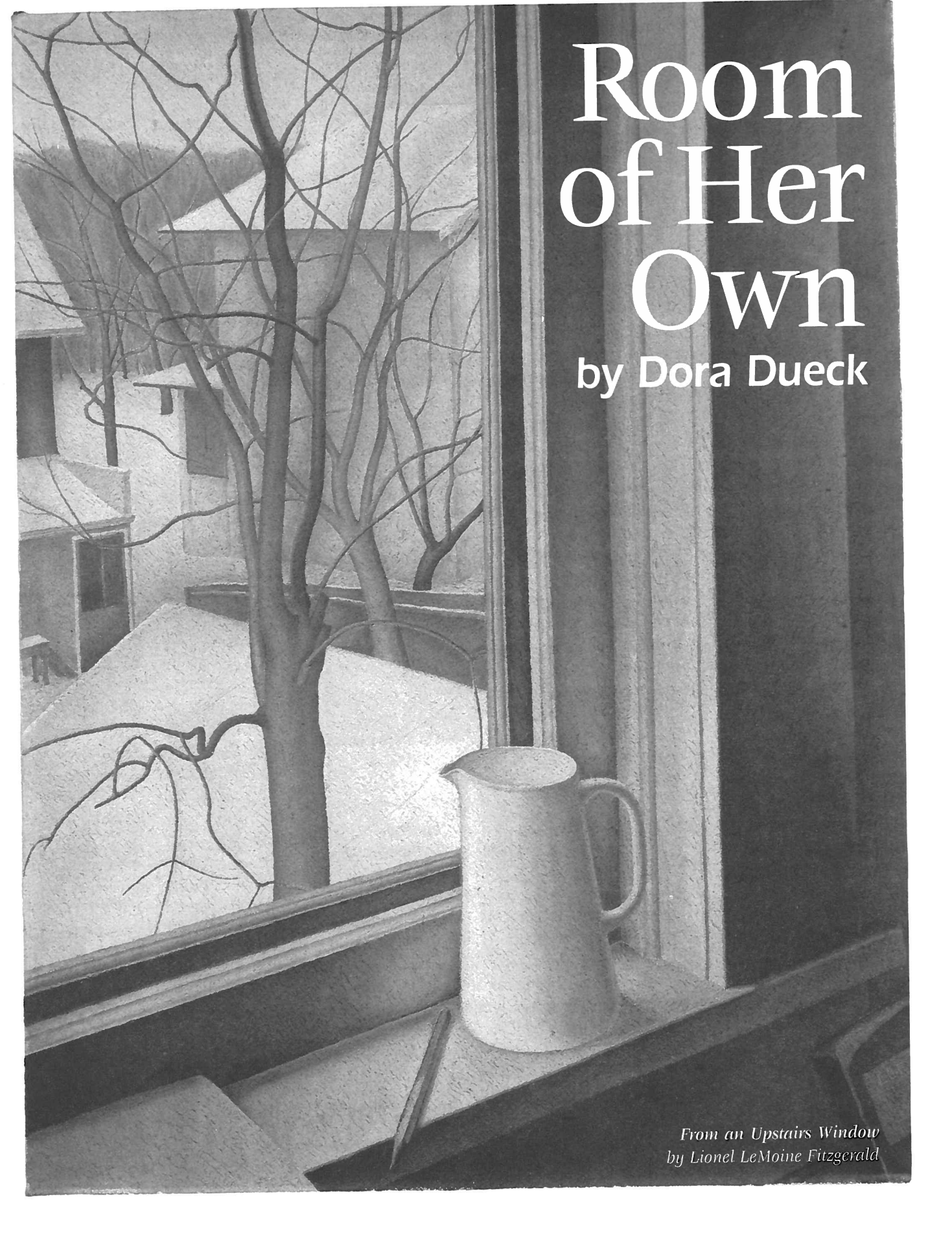
The idea of a man and a woman bound together for life in legal and holy matrimony is both awesome and

terrifying to Mason. He exults in his relationship with his wife, and yet, he fears what it means: it means being naked in both body and soul, known by another as he has never been known. "If a man has a pimple on his private parts then his wife will know about it, and only his wife, and the same will be true of the minutest blemishes on his soul" (p. 84).

In this trap, this dungeon, this clash of wills, this raw honesty of two people committed for life – in this is God. As Mason describes marriage, God is so inextricably woven into the fabric of the relationship that one cannot imagine that marriage can be marriage without God's presence. Committing one life to another is such a major step, according to Mason, that it can't even be contemplated without the enabling grace and love of God.

The Mystery of Marriage is not a book of advice. It doesn't lay out roles for husbands and wives – and thank goodness for that. Neither does it rely on anecdotes to carry its points (Mason's metaphors are far more vivid than many stories would be). Its language is sometimes excessive. But it is full of wisdom. It challenges and illuminates. And having read it, marriage partners – both male and female – will sense they are better equipped to enter into, if not solve, the mysteries of their own marriage.

.....
 Debra Fieguth, *Sophia* editorial committee member, and Ian Ritchie entered the mystery of marriage together in June 1997.



Room of Her Own

by Dora Dueck

*From an Upstairs Window
by Lionel LeMoine Fitzgerald*

The phrase “room of her own” has entered contemporary language as a metaphor for the exercise of a woman’s individuality within her world. I want to reflect on it here in particular reference to her personhood within marriage.

That she remains a person after the wedding day I take as a given. How could it be otherwise? Marriage enacts the common bone, yes, the common flesh of man and woman, as we read of it in the Genesis account of creation. But in the lines “therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh” we also see that the couple the young man leaves is still composed of two people, named here by their roles of father and mother. The last generation’s “one flesh” is two persons; the next pair will be two as well.

But if the individual can be assumed to continue, the practical expression of that reality over the course of a marriage may be more complicated. Perhaps one way is to take the metaphor (room as personhood) and let it occupy real room, real space. (This indeed was originator Virginia Woolf’s use of it when she said a woman writer requires a room of her own.)

When we married twenty-five years ago, my husband and I lived in a tiny house that we renovated, decorated, and gradually filled with the paraphernalia of domesticity. Neither of us had a separate space within the house. It was not big enough, for one thing, and for another, the energy of our marriage at that stage flowed into discovering how to share our lives, how to live that “one” of marriage. Both of us went to work every day and that was individuality enough; we were all too happy to return to our cozy shared nest.

As our marriage passed from its newlywed stage to that of establishing ourselves as a family, our roles and relationships were multiplied by the addition of children. Since I stayed at home with them, the house seemed more “mine” than it had before. As the children grew older, however, they began asserting their citizenship there. Two facts became clear: the common areas belonged to all of us, and, each needed a little space of his/her own. This was true for Mom (me) too. Finding places that expressed my life apart from my roles made it easier, in fact, to resist the subtle temptation to fight for my individuality in the generalized milieu of the place or intertwine myself with the house as a whole. (I visited a house once where the woman, in the form of her distinctive tastes and handwork, seemed to have taken over the entire place. Even the master bedroom was a showpiece of pretty, color-coordinated femininity.)

Isn't this what "room" of one's own is all about, the possibility for personal continuity?

Finding those places for myself was often a challenge. It became increasingly urgent, as life got fuller, to have a spot to be nourished by solitude or work on personal projects, but our houses during our first ten years or so were small. During one period it was a typewriter set up in the unfinished basement. During another it was the refuge of a locked bathroom – reading, praying or soaking in the tub – or, with my husband holding the fort, taking a walk. I used to quite enjoy shopping if I could do it alone, just me and my grocery cart. Most importantly, I found a lovely room of my own in keeping a journal. I recorded struggles, prayers, joys, quotes from my reading. Here I was able to keep remembering who I was and who I wanted to be. These were portable privacies. They were what that stage allowed.

But I longed to work more seriously at my writing. “I need a desk” – this terse recognition stands at the end of a journal entry on January 15, 1985. A desk became an imperative; it pushed its way up our list of priority purchases. Long before we had a decent couch and a great number of other things, I had my very own desk squeezed

into a corner of our bedroom.

What a wondrous thing is a desk! No matter that several years passed before there was a place for it outside our bedroom; this was a room within a room, a place to work and a place to store and display and pile up that which was specific to me. Best of all, I could leave things on my desk, however organized or disorganized they might be, while I attended to other responsibilities. When returning, I could start again where I had left off. There was no need to close and open myself again, as it were, to clear off for supper or tidy because of company. Isn’t this what “room” of one’s own is all about, the possibility for personal continuity?

Currently I am fortunate to have my own office in our house. But now that our children are relatively independent, I’ve returned to university studies and so the “room” of my life is broader and more portable again. After lodging my individual pursuits within our residence so many years, it’s an adjustment for both of us. How will new spaces, both geographically and of the mind, fit into our marriage in its second twenty-five years?

These anecdotes of “room” from my life are not meant as a model for others, but perhaps they suggest differing strategies for differing times. Sometimes we must search for room of our own, sometimes we insist on it, and sometimes it’s simply there to enjoy.

I must add, however, that research for this article on the connection between space and the woman’s experience of personhood has made me more aware of how our understanding of these concepts is shaped by our cultural con-

Continued on page 21 ►



By Helga Doerner

Be still, and know that I am God. I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth!" Psalm 46:10 RSV

It seems as if it was in another life time that I stumbled across those opening words of Psalm 46:10. Little did I know then what profound and ever-deepening meaning the words "be still" would assume. My journey began a decade ago on a wintry Tuesday afternoon, after a typical start to my day. It had been the usual full morning: up at 6:00 a.m.; getting myself ready for work; prodding along my five-year-old son, Jonathan, who loved to dawdle, and of course the last minute instructions for the babysitter. Jonathan had a bus to catch. I had a bus to catch. By the time we headed out the door, we had to set a brisk pace to catch the school bus. Breathless, we arrived at his stop just moments before the bus arrived. The pace was no slower at work.

Shortly after noon I returned from work to take over from the sitter and hurriedly got ready to attend a Christian Women's Coffee Fellowship. Preparation meant forfeit-

I breathed a sigh of relief as my friend and I walked down the hotel basement stairs to join the Coffee Fellowship. All this to spend a few hours with women. As I walked through the doors of the meeting room, a tittle on the ever-present book table caught my eye. *Be Still*. The words were a sharp contrast to my experience of the day. When did I have time to be still? Balancing work, a

ing lunch, packing a bag with all the paraphernalia a fourteen-month-old might need and bundling up two children to head out into the cold. Knowing my friend would be arriving within a few minutes, I attempted to direct Jonathan into his snowsuit and boots while I rushed the bundling of my one-year-old, James. Hearing my friend's car in the driveway, I heaved the diaper bag on my left shoulder, lifted James into the same arm, then with one free arm opened the front door to let Jonathan out before juggling baby and diaper bag while I locked up the house. With myself and the children finally ensconced in the car, I had ten minutes of respite before the chaos of settling Jonathan and James with new sitters in an unfamiliar place.

household and a family did not lend itself well to being still. Yet the words stayed with me. As a born-again believer I knew that daily quiet moments were considered a prerequisite of a strong faith. But again and again the pace of life eroded away the pauses I attempted to establish for myself. Though the words challenged me to start the process of setting aside time again, somewhere within the chaotic and hectic pace of life, I found it most difficult to carve out a niche of quiet. Something had to change.

It took me a year to decide to leave my work in order to regain a healthier sense of balance. The decision left me with mixed feelings. Leaving work meant more physical, emotional and mental energy to devote to my family. It also meant leaving behind a rich source of adult social contact and a profession I found both challenging and rewarding.

The decision made, I settled into a slower routine. My long neglected practice of a daily quiet hour was reestablished. Initially, this was little more than an act of acknowledging the existence of God through scriptural readings and prayer. Yet simultaneously something unexpected began to unfold. I had left work with fears of loneliness, isolation and boredom. The fears did not materialize. Instead my life was enriched. I met a number of women with whom new and wonderful friendships were woven. Unconscious though I was of her active presence, the Divine One was at work honouring the time I spent in quiet acknowledgment.

Three years later, laryngitis left me voiceless for six months. In addition, pneumonia set in. For a period of weeks, which felt like forever, my activities were at a minimum. Unable to pursue the normal activities of my day and unable to pick up the phone to talk to family and friends, I entered a depressing isolation. In this place of silence and inactivity, books became my companions. One stands out from the rest. It was a gift from my mother. The words invited me in and did not let me go until I reached the end. When I finally set the book aside, I recognized that God had brought me to this place of silence in order to introduce herself. God desired more than acknowledgment. In quiet isolation, I met a present God who wanted to be heard and needed me to listen. Stillness became more than setting aside time each day to read the Bible or a devotional reading and to pray. Stillness became the quiet in which God spoke.

As I regained my health, I experienced the stress of a life being reshaped. I no longer knew who I was. Illness had stripped me of roles that had defined me. My baby had grown up and was now in school. A return to work was impossible as my practising license had lapsed. From defining myself as a professional health care worker tem-

porarily on leave of absence from the work force, I was left with roles of wife, mother, homemaker and financial dependent. I felt the irony of being a stay-at-home mom when both my sons were finally in school. Life could never be what it was before. God desired to be an integral part of who I was. I struggled with the frustrations of living day to day instead of mapping out plans for years at a time. The messages of my daily devotions were, consistently, *listen, wait and trust.*

For two soul-searching years I remained a stay-at-home mom while anxiety gnawed at me. It was my desire to listen, wait and trust. Yet I wondered if I were capable of discerning God's direction. It was as if God had purposefully wrestled the distractions of work and volunteer activities from my hands to free me up to experience a closer encounter with

Divine Mystery. As I steeped myself in the word of God and spent time in prayer, I became aware that I was not yet done with uncovering the meaning of being still. Gradually, a consciousness grew of the Divine Will's desire to shape my life. Acknowledgment of and listening to God were only the beginning. The next step was trusting, not that God would grant me what I wanted, but trusting God as tailor of each day.

There is little that feels more frightening than giving up control. Yet, with a lessening sense of trepidation and uncertainty, I am gradually letting go of the pervasive temptation to plan my own life. As it unfolds into the mystery of the unknown, guided by Spirit and Word continually surprising me with unexpected and unimaginable revelations, peace seeps through the fear. Stillness has become an internal experience, as I practise an attitude of trust in the God who creates, nourishes and shapes our being.

"Be still, and know that I am God." As I continue to ponder these words, I wonder if it is possible to experience sustained stillness. Is it possible to come to a place of experiencing God so profoundly and pervasively that we become irrevocably anchored in the Peace that is beyond all understanding? In this chaotic and fragmented world, stillness needs to be more than a quiet hour within the hectic pace of life. It needs to reach beyond attentive listening and the experiencing of an ever-deepening sense of inner peace. We have need of being rooted so deeply in the Divine Will that stillness remains at our center and is transformed into a courageous faith even as we step into the midst of life's challenges.

.....
Helga Doermer, Sophia editorial committee member, is currently studying theology at the University of Winnipeg.

*Stillness became the
quiet in which God spoke.*

Can Anger Make us Sick?

by Ruth E. Krall

After being diagnosed with endometrial cancer in 1995, Ruth E. Krall, professor of religion and psychology and director of peace studies at Goshen College, began to grapple with this question. She wondered about the role anger might have played in bringing about her dreaded diagnosis and the implications this might have for other women's lives. The following is excerpted from a paper called "Anger and Feminist Hermeneutics" that she presented at the "Wind and Fire: Anabaptist Women Doing Theology" Conference held in Winnipeg in May 1996.

In the midst of spontaneous and pervasive joy at a likely survival, I have also at times been overwhelmed with feelings of intense rage at the body. One evening shortly after my second round of surgery in three months, at a time when I was alone in the house and attempting to cope with fatigue and frustration at being unable to do some previously easy physical task, I was quite shocked to hear my voice spewing forth the words, "I hate you, body, for doing this to me." This event of uncensored angry screaming erupted so suddenly that I was stunned into hearing myself. In general, although I have a body that North American culture devalues, I do not hate it. I tend to see it as sturdy and strong. I enjoy the pleasures of the senses: a soaring operatic tenor voice, the intense colors of flowers in the spring, the hot summer winds of the desert, all bring joy to me.

That shouted frustration, however, subsequently prompted me to ask new questions about the role of stored body-anger as a causal factor in the development of this particular malignancy. In the light of clinical research about mind/body healing, I also asked myself about how the living presence of such volcanic anger might work against my healing. This outburst of body-anger has become my teacher about the unique ways I respond to others' anger at me and to my anger at others. I wonder about the intersection of the mind-body's response to women's encounter with anger – and with some feminist beliefs that anger is a necessary component of social change and of healing the wounds of the community – the "pueblo."

Feminist authors are not agreed about anger and its value to women. Nor are they agreed upon ways to manage anger in the various pueblos in which women live and work. It is clear, however, that women are fully acquainted with the presence of anger and rage in women's lives.

In addition, our awareness of sexual and physical vio-

lence in so many women's lives today has stirred into a frenzy ancient woman angers at being victimized. Many women are so angry about sexual violence, for example, that they can barely be civil in mixed groups of men and women. When expressing her female fear and rage at a culture that devalues her and sees her or her children as acceptable targets of violence, the woman spares no man her wrath. For some feminist women this anger and wrath are the fuel that motivates them to become activists; for others it is a fuel for theory-building. For still others, it is a moral response to violation and victimization.

My mother's Anabaptist theology taught me about the dangers of anger. My mother tolerated our childhood screaming and hitting as necessary development behaviors. But always, nearby, was the explicit teaching that violence was wrong, hatred was wrong, and too strongly expressed anger was wrong. The violence that we children did to each other was often addressed by both parents as we matured. At times apologies were insisted upon even when there was no personal desire to apologize. A forgiving spirit was also insisted upon even when there was no desire to forgive. Both parents strongly urged us to love each other and to avoid fighting with each other about material things. Vigorously expressed opinions about differences were not seen as anger or violence. We were encouraged both to be strong individuals with strong opinions and to listen to each others' points of view with respect.

My mother was not a sophisticated theologian but she had an Anabaptist hermeneutic of anger and violence.

When anger caused us to harm ourselves or others, it was wrong. When we had harmed another, we needed to apologize and to make whatever restitution we could. When another attempted to harm us, we could protect ourselves but never with reciprocal violence and anger. When I

consider the theological teachings of both family and community, I find a solid communal perception that anger that harms others is contrary to the love teachings of the New Testament. I find some awareness that anger that harms the self is contrary to these teachings as well, but less awareness that injustice is a frequent source of anger that must be handled by apologies and restitution. Embroiled in the social changes of our century, we have had very little theologizing about ways anger can inform us of personal and communal dangers in the world. We have given very little respectful attention to the claims of victims for our repentance and conversion.

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At the time of this writing, however, I have become an unbeliever in the power of anger to affect positive, lasting social change. I no longer believe in the ventilation of anger as a force of great healing in the world. I do not experience it as healing. Receiving anger from a legitimate or non-legitimate cause or motive, I withdraw somewhere deep within the self to a lead-shielded room. There, I use a psychic periscope to determine when it is safe to reappear. I may use the experience of having received the communication of anger to change, but it is not an easy change to bring about. It is never a change devoid of lingering resentment. This is partially because, having received anger, I want to send it back four-fold. I want to reciprocate with a message that communicates the strength of my emotional response to having been a target. In my psychic inner chambers, I rehearse and play back the anger-gift of another to me.

Nevertheless I do believe in a strong, grounded ability to state my perceptions of what is wrong with the world. This ability may initially be informed by the emotional experience of anger in a specific situation or encounter. Holding onto memories of that experience as fuel for social change has, however, too many dangers associated with it – dangers to the body and to the collective communal body of the pueblo.

I no longer believe in anger as a form of love. In my clinical training, I accepted psychotherapy's wisdom literature without critically examining its teaching in light of my Anabaptist faith and commitment to peace-making and justice-making. But, as a result of this past year, I have come to see anger as an emotional experience of responding to a moral perception that something is wrong. Anger may emerge within a loving relationship, but anger itself is a form of making moral claims upon the other to change his or her behavior. As a psy-

chotherapist-theologian I believe therapeutic dogma here: the only person I can realistically consider changing is myself. The continuing arousal of anger and the use of anger's energy to agitate for systemic change is too costly a bargain to make with my life.

I understand the need to hold my anger gently and to accept it while at the same time I must stay a grownup who manages it so that it does not destroy my inner bodySelf, the bodySelf of another or the communal body of the pueblo.

By my learning how to manage it, anger can serve me as a teacher, as an early warning system that something is amiss. By learning how to manage it, I do not need to retreat into conflict-avoidance, silence, passivity or adult innocence. My anger can guide me on important trails to understandings that I have missed before. Confronted with systems of lies and violence or with oppressive and unjust relationships, I must take a stand for truth, justice and love. The best of my Anabaptist Christian heritage teaches me this. I need to learn ways to say, "I am not a slave," that free me without attacking the dignity of the other. I need to learn ways to comprehend, "I am the tyrant, I must change."

One of the tasks of those who wish to become healers is to learn the depths of their personal woundedness. By learning how to confront and accept their own wounds as teachers, they gain wisdom about the wounds of others. Received anger is such a wound. The healer must learn the lessons of others' anger towards herself and of her own angers if the healing waters of transformation are to baptize us in our bodies and in our communities.

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Ruth Krall's paper can be read in its entirety in the Spring 1996 issue of The Conrad Grebel Review, Vol. 14, No. 2, pp. 145-163. Reprinted with permission.

Room of Her Own

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text. Both the needs and the solutions expressed here would probably baffle my great-grandmothers or a woman in a traditional African culture.

A fascinating multi-volume study, *A History of Private Life*, shows how the concepts of public and private, family and marriage, have been constructed differently throughout history. The twentieth century in the Western world has been marked by increasing consciousness of the individual. At the same time, there has been a revolution in housing.

Prior to changes in housing, individuals (apart from the wealthy) enjoyed privacy only in common with others who shared the same living space; private space was simply "the public space of the household." Antoine Proust suggests that, in the constant presence of others, secrets (dreams, desires, regrets, fears) offered a refuge for private life.

Today we have relatively abundant space and more opportunity for privacy. But ours is a confessional age; we have few secrets. Houses today, in fact, offer couples ever bigger master bedrooms, and as pay-off the subtle expectation that the essence of life exists here, and that everything must be shared. The room, after all, has a huge joint bed, a sitting area, a monster tub and private bathroom!

An awareness of the current societal context of space and privacy may help us recognize opportunities to live better within both our marriages and our individuality. It may also alert us to ways where we should use space against the grain of the dominant culture.

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Mourning incompleteness: In the desert, we can bewail our virginity

By Fr. Ron Rolheiser

There is a story in the Old Testament that both shocks and fascinates by its sheer earthiness.

A certain king, Jephthah, is at war and things are going badly for him and his army. In desperation he prays to God, promising that if he is granted victory he will, upon returning home, offer in sacrifice the first person he meets. His prayer is heard and he is given victory.

When he returns home he is horrified because the first person he meets, whom he must now kill in sacrifice, is his only daughter, in the full bloom of her youth, whom he loves most dearly. He tells his daughter of his promise and offers to break it rather than sacrifice her.

She, however, insists that he go through with his promise, but there is one condition: She needs, before she dies, time in the desert to bewail the fact that she is to die a virgin, incomplete, unconsummated. She asks her father for two months time during which she goes into the desert with her maiden companions and mourns her unfulfilled life. Afterwards, she returns and offers herself in sacrifice (Judges 11).

Despite the unfortunate patriarchal character of this story, it is a parable that in its own earthy way says something quite profound: that we must mourn what's incomplete and unconsummated in our lives.

Karl Rahner once wrote that "in the torment of the insufficiency of everything attainable we begin to

realize that here, in this life, all symphonies remain unfinished." He is correct.

In the end, we all die, as did Jephthah's daughter, as virgins, our lives incomplete, our deepest dreams and deepest yearnings largely frustrated, still looking for intimacy, never having had the finished consummate symphony...unconsciously bewailing our virginity. This is true of married people just as it is true for celibates. Ultimately, we all sleep alone.

And this must be mourned. Whatever form this might take, each of us must, at some point, go into the desert and bewail our virginity – mourn the fact that we will die unfulfilled, incomplete. It's when we fail to do this – and because we fail to do it –

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that we go through life being too demanding, too angry, too bitter, too disappointed and too prone to constantly blame others and life itself for our frustrations.

When we fail to mourn properly our incomplete lives then this incompleteness becomes a haunting depression, an unyielding restlessness,

and a bitter centre which robs our lives of all delight.

It is because we do not mourn our virginity that we demand that someone or something – a marriage partner, a sexual partner, an ideal family, having children, an achievement, a vocational goal or a job – take all of our loneliness away. That, of course, is an unreal expectation which invariably leads to bitterness and disappointment.

In this life, there is no finished symphony. We are built for the infinite. Our hearts, minds and souls are Grand Canyons without a bottom. Because of that we will, this side of eternity, always be lonely, restless, incomplete, still a virgin – living in the torment of the insufficiency of everything attainable.

My parents' generation tended to recognize this more easily than we do. They prayed, daily, the prayer: "To thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears." That prayer and others like it were their way of bewailing their virginity.

Contemporary spirituality tends to reject such an emphasis on the limitations of this life as unhealthy and a bit morbid. That is arguable. What is not is the fact that we never, here in this life, get the full symphony, the panacea to our loneliness. Any balanced, truly life-giving spirituality must take this into account and challenge people to understand, integrate and live out that fact.

A Year to Remember

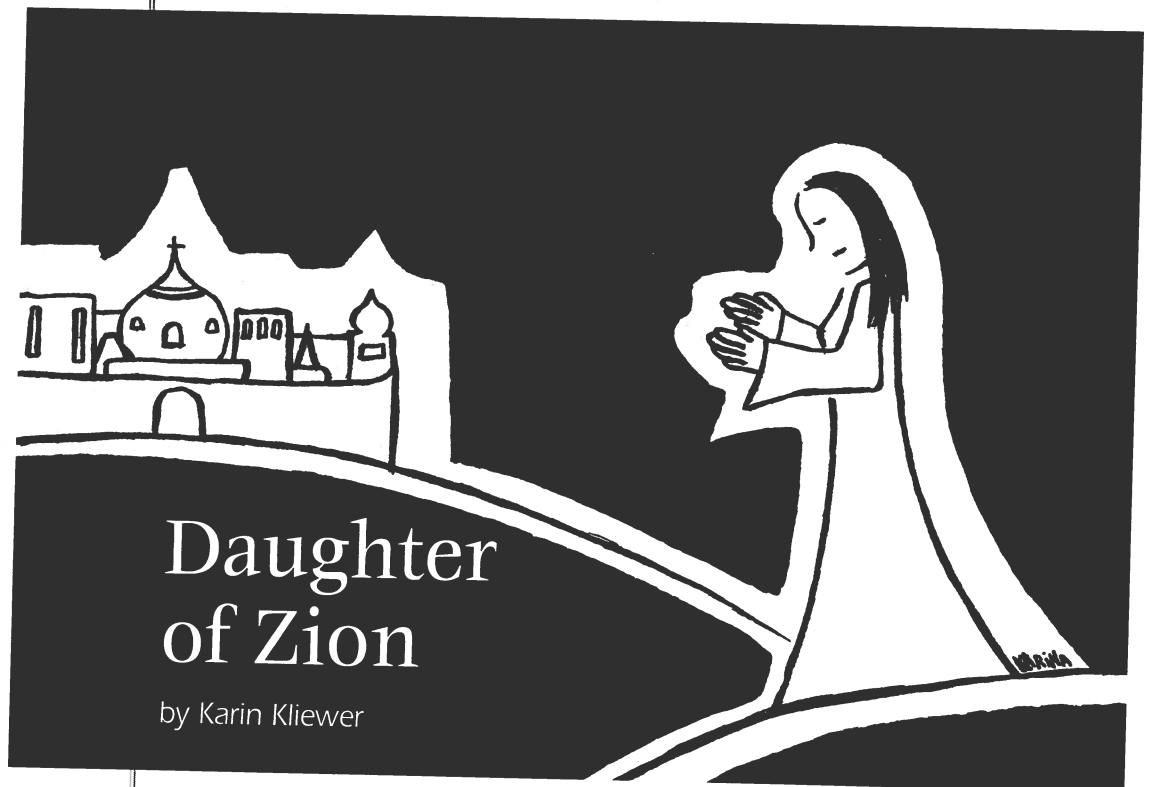
This past school year was the first of Concord College's "School of Discipleship," in which twenty-three post-high-school students embarked on a program filled with adventure and learning. The first semester was spent at Camp Evergreen and Canmore, Alberta, where the students participated in service projects and learned from a series of speakers. They were also "mentored" both individually and in small groups. The second semester was spent in Guatemala, where the students spent eight weeks in Spanish language classes, learning about Third World development and poverty issues, and doing local service assignments and then several weeks building homes with Habitat for Humanity.

The following drawing and writing expresses part of what one student learned during her year. Karin Kliewer explains this way: "This picture helps describe my experiences in Guatemala, what I've learned and also what I aspire to be. A woman stands, pure and strong with open hands, always ready to receive, humbly focused on Jerusalem's promise."

Perhaps the best way to do this is not the way of my parents' generation, who sometimes put more emphasis on life after death than upon life after birth. Maybe it is a bit morbid to consider this life so much a "vale of tears." But tears must be factored in. Otherwise, in the end, we are falsely challenged and the symbolic infrastructure of our spirituality is inadequate to handle our actual experience.

The daydreams of our childhood eventually die, but the source that ultimately fires them, our infinite caverns of feeling, does not. We ache just as much, even after we know the daydream can never, this side of eternity, come true. Hence, like Jephthah's daughter, there comes a time when we must go into the desert and mourn the fact that we are to die a virgin.

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Father Ron Rolheiser is an Oblate priest who divides his time between Toronto and Rome. This article was first published in Western Catholic Reporter in November 1992. It is reprinted with the author's permission.



Time has not considered this Daughter of Zion. She glides through the years as if they were days. Full of grace and wisdom, she is a foundation rock for her children and, as life continues, her children's children. She is a proverb in herself, a striking image of one who has triumphed, loved, lost, and lived. She is truly clothed with strength and dignity, fulfilled and bearing the name of promise and sacrifice. This woman has much to give because she knows Him who has given all. She is blessed now and will be blessed in eternity, this daughter of Zion.

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Set me as a seal upon your heart ...
for love is strong as death.

SONG OF SOLOMON 8:6