DreamSeeker Magazine

Voices from the Soul

Winter 2003
Volume 3, Number 1

Editorial: Longing Beyond the Surface

Full disclosure: not by design (at least conscious) but by coincidence, this issue of *DreamSeeker Magazine* ended up being a family project. Except for Marshall King, who has no direct family connections, every other writer whose name includes King is related.

Now I do not as editor intend to be an easy touch for family members. After seeing her work, I told one daughter, "Don't let anyone else have it. *I* want to publish it." But as she later reported, "I couldn't believe it! I've never been able to get Dad to publish anything of mine because he always says, 'Since you're my daughter, I'm not comfortable publishing that.'" And another daughter could confirm that, perhaps partly because she *is* my daughter, she had to do multiple rewrites.

Not by design . . . but by coincidence, this issue of *DSM* ended up being a family project.

Of course I'm flesh and blood. How can I ever be be sure I would have published these King authors if I didn't so well know and love them apart from their writing? So let me just wade in and say who is who: Nöel is my sister. How this affects my reaction to her writing I have no idea; I just know every time I read one of her "Turqoise Pen" columns I'm tickled and can't help but hope others will share in the joy. Kristy and Rachael are my daughters and Evelyn my aunt.

All one way or another wormed their way into my cold editor's heart maybe partly through first gaining access to my warm human heart as their brother, father, or nephew—but also, I hope, because each has something important to say.

Though I worked with each on separate tracks and only realized at the end what had happened, something special, I think, is revealed about life's stages by the fact that Evelyn at age 83 reports from the edge of death itself; Kristy ponders from the edge of adulthood at age 21 what a different culture can teach; and Rachael reveals the treasure a teenager can find when she looks in the right place. Meanwhile Nöel and I are in the generational middle, as from her earlier midlife and my later one we laugh or rage.

It turned out to be a good time for family members to be represented, given that regular columnists Valerie Weaver-Zercher and Dave Greiser were so busy they had to take a break this time around.

If King writers contribute to a theme that seems loosely to link these writings—which is along the lines of longing beyond the surface of what is—they are joined by many other gifted writers. The poets speak from or evoke such longing as they address lighthouse keeping, the vision in the mirror, dinnertime, seeing the angels. The writers on anger wonder when we must move beyond it and when anger provides the energy that helps us to see what is not but needs to be. Christian Early helps us wonder what would be the point of thinking if we never thought beyond our starting point. And in looking at war, present and past, Weaver and Hertzler are longing for the peace beyond it. Let it be so.

—Michael A. King

Editor
Michael A. King

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Editorial Council
David Graybill, Daniel Hertzler, Kristina M. King, Richard A. Kauffman, Paul M. Schrock

Columnists or Regular Contributors
David Greiser, Daniel Hertzler, Michael A. King, Valerie Weaver-Zercher

Publication, Printing, and Design
Cascadia Publishing House

Advertising
Michael A. King

Contact
126 Klingerman Road
Telford, PA 18969
1-215-723-9125
DSM@CascadiaPublishingHouse.com

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In This Issue

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Letter

Dear Editor, I just finished reading the Autumn 2002 issue of *DreamSeeker Magazine,* and I must tell you that I found it moving and refreshing. I was moved by Jack Orr's account of his return to church and how he was touched as 400 people began to sing "His Name Is Wonderful." Then in the next article, Joan King described the power of song as she felt it on the Sunday after 9-11 when the congregation sang "Precious Lord, Take My Hand."

I believe that music truly is one of God's most wonderful gifts to us. I am melted to tears whenever I hear Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" and sing the words of "Joyful Joyful We Adore Thee."

I found each article thought-provoking and timely. Luanne Austin's reminder that God is "I Am" and Daniel Hertzler's challenge to be alert to our environmental crisis were most relevant articles.

As for your article, "It All Ends," I wish our president could read it. I wrote to him about a month ago insisting that the Christian approach is "to overcome evil with good." To initiate war with Iraq will only intensify the hatred many in the Islamic world feel for Americans, not to mention the killing of thousands of innocent victims. Violence is never a final solution to any human problem.

However, we will not stop singing. Our God is the God of hope, and God has the last word, which like the first, is always good, no its better than good, it's wonderful. Peace and joy.

—Randy Klassen

Letters to DSM *are welcome, and occasionally we publish extended responses.*

The Lighthouse Keeper's Wife

My husband, as a child in bed, watched
the lighthouse—lit by an orange bulb
from some old string of Christmas
lights—and imagined himself a miniature
man, climbing the tiny steps, slippery
from the spray, chiseled
in a rock slab base. Then he'd enter
the door, arches like a cathedral
entrance. He told me this

on our wedding night, the balcony
of the Getaway Motel in Indianapolis,
as we stared, below us, at stammering
neon lights. A year later
we moved to the Atlantic Coast
and he found a job as lighthouse keeper.
Year after year, he climbed the spiral
staircase while I followed. At first,
I imagined ships were coming and squinted
toward the ocean's edge. One had purple
sails and a cargo of parakeets, violin
music that cried like a human voice.

But never was I lonely, though for days
we saw no one but ourselves and both of
us started collecting things: scallop shells,
broken coral, pieces of bottle glass
rubbed into polished stones. Looking through them
was like peering through stained glass windows, only
they were a softer shade. Not everything

was easy. Once, when my husband left for town,
the fog bell broke, and I pulled for hours on strands
of unbraided rope, once every fifteen seconds, until
my blistered palms broke open. Several times
the wind blew small boats against our shore
and we stumbled through icy, frothy waves to catch
their sides and lead them in. What we noticed first
was how our hands were getting smaller
in relation to the fish and how the waves were growing,
curling higher, more exuberantly, like the sky
in a Van Gogh painting. The light from our windows
was another clue: it shone so slim upon the water,
the shape of electric eels. After half a century,

the Coast Guard installed a computerized light and fog bell.
They scooped us up, like fish in a plastic bag,
and drove us to a Home in Indianapolis.
But we had become too small to fit the human world.
My husband couldn't reach the doorknob, and even stretching
I wasn't tall enough to see, above the window ledge, the buildings
clouding the horizon. The day my husband died, I climbed
into the lighthouse we kept beside our bed. I've bolted
all the windows and warm my hands—the blood veins branching
like violet sea fans—over the electric flame.

—*Shari Miller Wagner, Carmel, Indiana, is a prize-winning poet with an MFA in creative writing from Indiana University. Her poems have been published in a variety of literary magazines, including* Indiana Review, Black Warrior Review, *and* Southern Poetry Review.

The Happy Day

Evelyn King Mumaw

I'm guessing I was nine or ten when it happened.

One afternoon I was trudging up the road on the way home from school. For some reason I was by myself and loving my aloneness, for then I could daydream as I reveled in doing—daydream about all the years that lay ahead and of what it would be like when I was grown.

It was a delightful, lazy fall day—probably with white clouds in a blue sky and the air pleasant and balmy. Soothing, restful country quiet was all about me, broken only occasionally by an automobile on the Lewis Road in the distance, the mooing of a restless cow, the chirping of a startled bird.

And I was very happy.

Something about that dreamy day made me feel like it was a very special time—a day I would like to remember always.

But then, I thought, *How could I do that? So many afternoons would come and go, many like this one. Likely this one will melt into the past and be lost as one of a thousand other days.*

I decided to try something I'd never heard of doing. I'd think real hard about this wonderful day, about what it was like, about where I was, about how happy I was. I'd vow never to forget it but to think

about it often. And maybe I could remember it even when I was a grown-up, older woman.

That was 70 years ago and more. Guess what, little Evie: I do still remember that special yet ordinary fall day and the vow you made never to forget it.

—Evelyn King Mumaw, Harrisonburg, Virginia, ended her account of generations of ancestors plus her own story through age 13, The Merging: The Story of Two Families and Their Child *(Telford, Pa.: DreamSeeker Books/Pandora Press U.S., 2000, pp. 193-194), with the above anecdote, which she wrote at age 80, some three years before the article that follows. Taken together, the writings above and on page 7 provide bookends to a lifetime.*

Into the Mirror

Once I thought that if you looked into a mirror long enough,
you would be able to see into your soul
and for that one moment, you would understand life.

Once I dreamed that if I stayed long enough
in the salty bliss of the ocean,
the world around me would stop
and I would be left in my place of fairy tales.

Once I hoped that if I held on long enough,
I'd never have to let go of the things I cherish,
yet it seems I've had to let go.

It seems that of all the things
I've thought, dreamed, or hoped,
only one has lasted on—
that my hopes, dreams, and soul-searching,
will live only if I keep them.

I once stood in front of a mirror,
and I searched for my soul,
and suddenly I realized
all I saw
was me.

—Rachael L. K. King, Telford, Pennsylvania, is in ninth grade at Indian Crest Junior High School. At 69 years younger, she is the grand-niece of Evelyn King Mumaw.

When Death Announces Its Nearness

Evelyn King Mumaw

Something new and unexpected happens when death sends a message on ahead that he will be coming for you before long.

Your focus changes. You have been planning earth-based activities for the future. Now you focus on setting your house in order as you prepare to leave it.

You experience a whole new gamut of feelings, thoughts, and questions. Things you hadn't felt or thought before run persistently through your mind.

Your perspective changes. Many elements of life and living that have been important to you lose their importance. Many things that had been only minimally important now take on major significance.

Such is turning out to be my experience.

As I have shared with friends about these changes I have been encouraged to express in writing what has been happening in my mind and spirit.

With the Lord's help I have tried to do that. Perhaps my shared journey can help to break the loneliness of the way for others needing to take a similar journey.

Oh, No!

You have cancer. It's ampullary cancer—a rare kind—cancer of the bile duct. It does not respond well to chemo or radiation treatments. There is only one possible cure: whipple surgery. That is radical surgery that takes some of a number of organs around the tumor. It would be harder on you than your open-heart surgery was. The recovery period would be lengthy. The quality of life following this surgery is often very poor. Forty percent of the persons who undergo it live five more years.

The other surgical possibility is a bypass from the stomach to the small intestine. This will not limit the growth of the tumor or the spread of the cancer. It will simply bypass blockages.

Bit by bit, from many doctors, all of this information and more came searing its way into my mind and consciousness. Gradually, in the days that followed, I worked at processing it.

Help!

After discussing possible surgeries with me one doctor said, "*You* must decide. No one can decide for you. Think about it and pray about it and then decide."

But having seen three family physicians, two gastroenterologists, two oncologists, one cardiologist and three surgeons, and having had an ERCP with stint placement, an echocardiogram, an upper GI check, a blood transfusion and various other intravenous treatments and much lab work done, I was utterly confused. I was too weak to think clearly and find my way through this mountain of foreign information that had been given to me.

And I *had* prayed and prayed and so had lots of other people.

I'm almost 83. I can't live forever. . . . Why should I try so hard to stay here when the end of life, sooner or later, is inevitable? But I do want to stay. . . .

All I could say was "Help me Lord!" And he did. My spirit became quiet and after some hours I began to think more clearly again.

83 and Vacillating

I'm almost 83. I can't live forever. Perhaps this is my time to call it quits and go on home. Why should I try so hard to stay here when the end of life, sooner or later, is inevitable? But I do want to stay; God made me that way. I do want to be involved in the life of my church, to see the development of the Brethren-Mennonite Cultural Center, to take the beginner's class about computers, to be a support to my sister, to complete my writing projects, to interact in stimulating conversation with friends and family members, to share my faith freely wherever I have the opportunity, to revel in the changing seasons. . . .

It's early fall—just hinting at the glory soon to be. The geraniums, nasturtiums, roses, begonias, trumpet plant, spreading mint, hostas, and three tomato stalks in my northeast bed are an array of delight.

The hummingbirds, goldfinches, rosy finches, mockingbirds, cardinals, mourning doves, blue jays, Carolina wrens, robins, and song sparrows bring life and cheer as they come to visit and feed at my feeders. The bunnies and the squirrels come too.

The harvest moon was big, bright and full a couple nights ago.

The night creatures join the pre-frost chorus—or is it a symphony they perform? When late night quiet falls about us, their sounds stand out clear and full.

I remember the title of a poem written by the late M. T. Brackbill: *Lord, I Like It Here*. I guess I do, too! And I'd like to stay awhile longer.

More About Being 83

Of course this thing of being 83 influences my decisions, my goals, my plans, my dreams, my outlook on life.

All my life I've been a planner. I've made my lists of things I'd like to do, places I'd like to travel to, goals I'd like to reach, improvements I'd like to make, projects I'd like to complete . . . But at 83, with heart disease and cancer, most of those lists are no longer reasonable or realistic. Goals must be revised, projects adjusted, dreams changed, and travel done by videos or local trips.

There are still many ways in which my life can be worthwhile and full of joy.

At present I am reading the Bible through—one more time.

I have time to pray for many people and situations.

I want to review and sharpen my accuracy on passages I've memorized over the years—of course in the King James Version.

As long as I can I'll keep on writing letters to friends and extended family members.

I am blessed with good vision so I can read and read.

I love visiting with friends when I am strong enough.

I want to keep on stretching my mind and exploring new areas of thought and insight.

Addendum: Being 83 had much to do with my decision not to have major whipple surgery. If only 40 percent of the persons undergoing that surgery live five years following the surgery, that means 60 percent live less than five years after surgery. And if quality of life is very poor during those several years, why bother!

One Foot Here—One Foot There

The struggle for balance in perspective when you are my age and have heart disease and cancer is not easy. If my time here is nearly spent, I should be finishing my projects, disposing of my possessions, writing some farewell letters, canceling that clothing order, relinquishing responsibilities. . . .

But I don't really know if I'm leaving soon. The Lord may shrink that tumor and give me more good years. I find myself planning ahead for Christmas, for next spring's plantings and social activities, for church involvement . . . and then I remind myself, *If I'm still here.*

It's sort of like having one foot in heaven and eternity and the other one on earth in fleeting time; the walking gets a little awkward and disjointed

sometimes. But it shouldn't. I need to learn how to live graciously in both worlds without losing my balance.

Terminally Ill

Terminally ill. What an ominous phrase! We don't use those words in the presence of the ill one. We say it quietly, in hushed tones, outside of the ill one's hearing.

I am terminally ill. Have been a long time. Just didn't know or realize it until recently.

And, hey! You are too. You just aren't as aware of it as I am.

During the past week at least three people whose lives have touched mine in some way, and who were much younger than I, have died. They did not know they were terminally ill. Nor did their families know it.

Face it. We are all terminally ill. Death is stalking us. We'd best come to terms with him now.

I'm curious.

I guess that's just another way of saying, "I wonder why. . . ?"

Three years ago I almost died from heart disease. I had open-heart surgery with three bypasses and a valve replacement. Six months later the main bypass closed. Currently the replaced valve is calcifying. So I thought I'd had my waterloo. Enough for one small elderly woman.

Now cancer—dreaded disease. And not the ordinary kind, if such there be. A rare kind, practically untreatable.

So I'm curious. I'm wondering why I should need to experience both of these dreadful illnesses. I'm not blaming God for them, I'm not mad at him. He didn't send them. But he permitted them, and I wonder why. Does God have a special reason or purpose for allowing them? Does it take extra suffering to teach me the lessons I need to learn because I learn so slowly? Or is it difficult to mold me into the vessel God wants me to be?

What does he want to accomplish through all of this?

I'm curious. I wish I knew. But then, perhaps it's best this way.

Don't Waken Me!

It seems like I've had a bad dream—of hospitals, tests, doctors and more doctors, many "sticks," weakness, red, orange and yellow jello . . . and cancer.

I'm at home, comfortable, eating well, using my exercise bike, taking my vitamins, going places, enjoying life. Nothing the matter with me!

Please don't waken me. I'm having this good dream now.

One Day at a Time

How now shall I live? Taking life one day at a time, I'm trying to make the most of each day. That sounds so trite. There is even a song that says "One day at a time, dear Lord. That's all I'm asking from you."

But the idea becomes a new reality when life's uncertainties demand recognition. No one knows for sure what will be in the next day, but many people say that with an underlying expectation that tomorrow will be very much like today. Yet some of us know that tomorrow is very uncertain.

There is another approach to living in uncertainty that appeals to me. I have adopted it as my slogan to live by. "I will live each day as normally as I can as long as I can." That is what I'm trying to do.

I'm bringing in fresh flowers. I'm feeding and giving water to the birds. I'm writing notes and visiting with my guests. I'm doing lots of reading. I'm preparing my own simple meals and going for my groceries.

Sometimes I press the boundaries of normal living a little much, such as when I went to Village Coffee. And when I went to the worship service even though I left before dismissal.

But I'm trying!

Dear Lord, You know better than anyone else does how ill I am with what appears to be terminal cancer. After thinking about the implications of all this, there are several things I need to say about where I have arrived.

My Pact with God

After several weeks of facing the reality of this illness, and thinking of what it could mean for me, I made this commitment to the Lord.

Dear Lord,

You know better than anyone else does how ill I am with what appears to be terminal cancer. After thinking about the implications of all this, there are several things I need to say about where I have arrived.

I know that you are the healing God. I have experienced healing again and again through these many years. You work miracles; sometimes instantly, other times over longer periods of time.

I'd like to be healed, and I know without doubt you can heal me. I'm not demanding or insisting that you heal me. But I'm letting you know that I am very open to your doing repair work to this temple of yours.

If you do not see fit to heal me, I will love you and trust you just the same. I will trust you to walk with me through whatever comes. I will trust you to supply the grace I need for each day. If I am tempted to demur, I will remember the submission of Jesus as he faced suffering and told his Father "Not my will but thine be done."

My desire is that out of these two possibilities you will choose the path for me through which you will receive the most glory. I know that will be best.

I look forward to the time when and place where I will be completely healed with a new body like that of my risen Lord.

—Your unworthy but devoted child.

I Count My Many Blessings

How blessed I am! If I were a refugee woman or developing-world resident with this illness, I shudder to think what I would endure. But I am here, and I am immersed in blessings. So in the morning, in the day, and at night I remember God's goodness expressed in innumerable ways— and I give thanks.

Sometimes during wakeful night hours I think of my simple but pleasant and comfortable home, of the deliciousness of night quiet interrupted only by the singing of little night creatures. I slip out on to my back deck

and feel the refreshingly cool night air. I look up at the stars and marvel at their constancy. I give thanks to their creator, theirs and mine.

In the morning I give thanks that the Lord has kept me through the night, has provided warm water for my morning bath, clean clothing to encourage me to greet the day, nourishing food to renew my strength. Then there's the song and message from the Christian radio station that stirs my hope for the day.

I am so grateful for a daily quiet, undisturbed time with the Lord; I mean that time when I give my full attention to his speaking through his word and my responding to him in prayer. If I'm wakeful in the night, that's my time. If not then, I take an hour or more upon waking in the early morning. I give thanks for God's presence then and throughout all of my day.

In the evening I review my day. In it I have answered the phone again and again; gone through my mail; welcomed and enjoyed visitors; relished a neighbor's fresh bread, applesauce or potato soup; laughed at a loved one's bit of humor; sung over and over a song fixed in my mind by the Spirit; ridden my exercise cycle; given water to my plants and the birds; and brought in fresh flowers. These are a sample of experiences in which I have joy and give thanks.

Today I am nearly free of pain. Oh how grateful and blessed I am!

I have been asked what place fear holds in my present experience. My greatest fear is the fear of pain.

Fear

I have been asked what place fear holds in my present experience. My greatest fear is the fear of pain. My threshold for enduring pain is not very high. And of course I've heard the horror stories of cancer pain and suffering. So yes, I am afraid of the pain that may await me.

I am afraid of my reactions to pain. Will they be a reproach to my Lord? Can I give a clear testimony that his grace is enough for me? Can I claim his grace?

What about fear of dying? I'm basically shy and hesitant about going new places and trying new experiences by myself—a little fearful. I wish I knew more about heaven—the afterlife—and eternity. I know with my mind it will be wondrous and glorious but I can't seem to get that into my feelings.

My trust in Christ's work to provide my salvation removes the greatest fear. I deserve nothing but rejection; I have failed the Lord in so many ways so there is no reason why he should favor me with eternal life in heaven. But, thank God, someone told me that Jesus died to save me and have me with him in heaven. So my faith is in him and his work on my behalf.

As to the actual dying; some years ago in intense pain I passed out and slumped to the ground. Somehow in that experience I sensed the ease with which I could have died. The dying itself would not have been a dreadful experience—just a passing from one state of being to another.

So the thought of death—while I do not anticipate it with pleasure—neither do I dread or fear it greatly.

Tempered Grief

The thought of leaving the familiar, the pleasing, the enjoyable, the comfortable . . . brings a sort of grief to my spirit.

And my things, my possessions. Oh I know people often say of a loss, "They are just material things, they don't really matter."

But many of my things do matter to me. The desk my grandmother sent from Ohio to Pennsylvania to help furnish our home after the fire, the lovely wooden bowls and candleholders John made for me on his lathe, the cedar chest my parents gave me for my twenty-first birthday, the tall chest of drawers my Virginia grandfather gave my grandmother whom I never knew, memorabilia I saved from early childhood until now, my books. . . . Just things? No. They are symbols of the many ways God has blessed my life. They remind me of his grace and goodness and all the people and experiences through which he has enriched my life.

I confess that I grieve a bit at the thought of leaving all these simple but significant items that have been so much a part of my life.

There are the experiences I have treasured that have blessed my life so richly. Now I find myself wondering repeatedly if this is the last time that I will be able to take communion, plant my spring flowers, sing with a special group, travel to Pennsylvania, attend Park Village activities, experience the change of seasons, prepare a meal for friends. . . .

And of course leaving the people I love who bless me in so many ways brings a measure of sadness. No more reunions with siblings or daughters or nephews and nieces and grandchildren. No more letters from members of my large extended families. No more discussions with friends about the really important things of time and eternity. No more times of rich fellowship with prayer partners. No more thrilling at the development of young people in the church. No more enjoying my good neighbors.

Yes, there is grief that accompanies the realization that I have a terminal illness. But it is tempered by the certainty, though vague at times, that there will be joys with the Lord that are beyond comparing with the joys I leave behind. Then, too, I am aware that so many family members and friends I've loved are already over there. And many I love here now will soon join us over there.

Grief? Yes. But a tempered grief.

Anger

I think of myself as not being a very angry person. But for a time one day I felt angry at this ampullary cancer. I was angry at it for stealthily invading my body, devastating it, and changing my entire life. I wanted to tell it in no uncertain terms to be gone. I wished for the power to cast it out!

I also struggle with anger at the seeming complacency in our society about cancer. It is all around me taking one life after another, disrupting

other lives, devastating families. People of all ages are its victims.

And yet there seems to be an almost quiet acceptance of what is happening. Oh I know research is being done and cancer societies are hard at work. But I'm thinking about the mood and response of society in general.

I compare the public's reaction to cancer with the outcry about AIDS. Great sums of money are being demanded and designated for finding its cure. Worldwide conferences deal with it. One reads about it in many publications. It seems to be on everyone's mind.

Understand, I do care about the people who are suffering from this horrible disease. Especially my heart goes out to the women and children who have been infected because of the profligate behaviors of spouses or of parents.

But at least AIDS is a preventable disease. How it is transmitted from one person to another is known. How to prevent cancer and what causes it are still largely unknowns.

I listen and ask, "Where is the outcry about cancer?" I feel puzzled and dismayed about the disparity of concern and action between these two killer diseases.

Sometimes my feelings border on anger—until I deal with them.

Refreshments for the Journey

The Lord has ways of providing encouragement and assurance for difficult days. Soon after I was hospitalized I spent time reading in the Psalms. I was assured of God's amazing sufficiency through Psalm 18:2. "The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my strength in whom I will trust: my buckler and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower."

I can't say that I know the meaning of all those strong, powerful words. But they give me the clear impression that individually and all together they provide whatever I need for the journey.

The Lord's hands? What does it mean to be in the Lord's hands?

"You are in the Lord's hands," friends remind me when they hear my story.

"I am in the Lord's hands," I say when I finish informing others of the doctors' evaluation of my condition.

The Lord's hands? What does it mean to be in the Lord's hands?

I recall Bible references about God's great and wonderful hands. I think of the ways the Lord Jesus used his hands in the years of his ministry. Then I know that I can count on the Lord's hands to minister to me.

In this period of my life, when I have been told by a number of doctors that they cannot cure my illness, I find myself wanting to curl up in the hollow of God's hand and trust him to be all I need. What better place to be than in the Lord's hands.

Crisis

While I was still in the hospital, I was told that the usual treatment for cancer would not cure this ampullary cancer. The doctors did inform me, however, that radiation and chemo could shrink the tumor and keep the disease from spreading.

The stent, which was placed in the bile duct, has made life fairly comfortable this past month and a half. But the stent is expected to function for only four to six months. So it seemed reasonable to consider radiation with xeloda, an oral chemo, to enhance it.

We have now talked to both the radiologist and the chemotherapist. The combined information received made it clear that this treatment could have major side effects. I could become quite nauseated and weak.

So what do I do?

Do I try to prolong life at great cost? Or settle for a brief time here, hopefully with less physical distress?

"If any man lack wisdom let him ask of God."

Please Lord—I need clarity of direction.

—Evelyn King Mumaw, Harrisonburg, Virginia, has long been a retreat leader as well as author of many articles and books, including Journey Through Grief *(Masthof Press, 1997) and* The Merging: A Story of Two Families and Their Child *(DreamSeeker Books, 2000). This article stops where it does not because her journey has ended but because* DSM *had to go to press. She plans to continue to write as long as she is able about what happens "when death announces it nearness."*

An American Woman Learns About Mexico Time

Kristy King

Five days before I left the country, my 21-year-old self finally got her driver's license. Getting my driver's license was one of the few areas in my life in which I procrastinated and turned what should have been a simple happy process into a long and slightly painful one. When I finally had that license in my hand, boy was I proud! However, after living in a small isolated town in Mexico with sand roads where you drive as you please, that license seems inconsequential. A lot of things we Americans worry about now seem insignificant.

But I'm not here to preach or to lecture. I simply want to bring alive a wonderful experience from Baja California Sur, Mexico, and what it taught me. In Baja, there is American time—on the dot, followed to the number, and there is Mexico time—anywhere from 15 minutes early to an hour late is acceptable.

Mexico time is not just a custom: it's a way and a choice of life. The choice is to experience a life not controlled by time, impossible deadlines, hitting all the green lights, and taking every little cent off income

taxes. The point is to live life happily, fully, to the most satisfied level—and then, only then, to make money and meet reasonable deadlines.

Until I went to Baja I was not aware of how fully I had lived life on "American" time. Last year I was an 18-credit hour (full course load) college student who was a CA (community adviser, otherwise thought of as a residence hall mom, monitor, and organizer), a stage manager (six nights a week and many additional hours), a friend, a daughter, a sister, and someone constantly striving toward perfection.

In Mexico, these many details and roles seemed to slip away. I was still a student, sister, and daughter, but I was also someone who took time for me and to appreciate what others and the world had to offer. One image especially comes to mind. Picture sand roads, sand dunes, sand beaches, and sand all over any clothing you have on. Then look beyond the sand to the sparkling water, and behind the water keep gazing, on out into the distance, where you spy jaw-dropping glimpses of red mountains on neighboring islands.

Many times I stood at the front of campus, sat on the beach, or planted myself in the sand marveling at this view. Not just due to the view itself but also because I was reminded of how many awe-inspiring vistas there are in the States and how many I see every day—yet I couldn't describe a single one in detail.

Another memory is of a time in which my worries, especially about money, seemed to slip away. It happened on a hot, sunny day, when we were interviewing members of the community about issues relating to sea turtles. After already having been given free, homemade, still-warm, mouth-watering tortillas, we went to another house to begin another interview. Over the course of the visit we were invited to a huge party and given mangos that the owner had picked from his tree and cleaned for us.

The house these people were living in was marked by poverty according to American standards. Yet there we were, being offered food, drink, and a good time.

What made this memory stand out is that the house these people were living in was marked by poverty according to American standards. Yet there we were, being offered food, drink, and a good time. For those few minutes my fears over loans, getting a paying job, and covering the bills went out the window; I remembered that money does not have to be the ruling factor in my life.

What I learned in Mexico came not just from the classes and exercises we were involved in but from the effects of each experience we were offered and the ongoing shifts in my outlook on life. Whether the experience came from a *ponga* (motorboat) ride, from a time around a bonfire with a group of friends, or from listening to the staff and the culture, I learned. What I learned is this: *Life is a journey*. Maybe to some degree I already knew that, but now I'm more willing to experience life that way.

I'm saddened to realize I've already lived 21 years on this earth and have done so much but taken time to remember so little. As I journey from now on, it will be more important to me to take time to remember while living and learning from life. I also am reminded that even when things seem to be colliding at the breakneck pace of a race car, there's much to be taken in, learned, and loved amid the chaos.

I guess I have two choices: to be stressed out, running around at the pace of American time—or to live with having a few things not get done, to accept that I'm not perfect, and to live at the pace of Mexico time. So, there you have it, my goal: to live as an American but to allow myself to mix in living as a Mexican might. Implementing that goal will itself not be easy or quick. Yet as one of our Mexico group leaders, who I think has already met this goal through his dedication not only to his job but also to himself and the environment, liked to put it, "No worries."

—*Kristy King is in transition between several Pennsylvania, Washington, D.C., and Virginia settings, having just finished college at Eastern Mennonite University. She is exploring options and hoping one of them will help her decide which direction the next stage of her life will take.*

Dinnertime

I set the table with care.
I open the soft white table cloth and
spread it neatly across the worn wood.
Bending down I hear fragments of
old conversations—water spewed when laughter
bubbles up too fast; small tight words when tears
choke the throats.

I ease the cloth over tiny drops of candle wax from
dinners that stretched into hours, filled with rambling
paragraphs of school, and cars, and friends, and God and
work, prayer, and body changes. Words woven with
humor and trust and love.

I set the table with care
The garden flowers, though small,
are bright and brave and proud in the
little glass vase.
I set the table with care

For I know
I am about to enter the sacred.

—*Tina Swartz Burkholder, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, is Director of Foster Care and Adoption at Bethanna.*

The Enigma of Anger

Reflections on a Sometimes Deadly Sin

Garret Keizer

"Be not too hasty," said Imlac, "to trust, or to admire,
the teachers of morality: they discourse like angels,
but they live like men."
—Samuel Johnson, *Rasselas*

Only three limbs of a sugar maple tree, none thicker than my arm but each broad enough to shade a horse, lay in a sprinkling of sawdust by the side of the road. On the trunk above them, three pathetic stumps oozed sap. This was my tree, one of the beautiful ancient maples that line our rural Vermont property where it meets the road. Those trees had caught our eye even before my wife and I had seen the "For Sale" sign on what is now our home.

I love to walk past those maples on afternoons when I finish work, and evenings before turning again to more work; I had especially longed to do so on that cloudy June day before unbuckling a briefcase full of final exams that would keep me up much of the night. Mine was a smug little joy, I realized even then, as much the pride of ownership as the appreciation of nature, but I didn't care. We want our joys to be harm-

less; we don't need them to be noble. But now even that small joy was cut short by the sight of those sawn-off limbs, enigmatic and almost insulting at my feet.

The town road crew had cut them off the tree; I was sure of that. The men had been grading that section of road in the afternoon just before I came home. I was less sure as to why they had cut them. The limbs had not hung out over the road. They had not been near any telephone or power lines. They had not been rotten or in danger of falling off. The only plausible reason I could imagine was that the road crew had cut off the limbs to make it easier to turn the grader, though there was an access to a hay field where they might have done the same thing less than a hundred feet away. Could they really have been so lazy?

But then, there didn't have to be a plausible reason, did there? Maybe one of the men had just felt like sawing off a few limbs—no different, really, from a kid in my classroom feeling in the mood to toss a rumpled wad of paper over my shoulder and into the trash can or to stick out his foot when another student walked by—except that no kid in my classroom would dare do such a thing. Well, some of the men around here (I muttered to myself) believe that nothing grows out of the earth or slips through a birth canal for any purpose better than to be cut down or shot. Today the limbs, tomorrow the whole damn tree, what the heck. If there's dynamite available, so much the better.

And I did not think it irrational to suppose that there was a message intended by the gratuitous sawing off of those limbs, something like the message I'd found soaped on my car windows on the first Halloween after we'd moved in: "F—you" plus "Ain't Vermont great?"—a message to the flatlanders lest they get too cozy in their precious little farmhouse and forget who was really in charge around here. We had scarcely lived in town long enough to strike up a conversation, let alone to make an enemy.

That was going to change. Tomorrow morning at 7:00, or whenever the town garage opened, I was going to deliver a little message of my own, which is that if you want to touch something that belongs to me, you'd better talk to me first or be prepared to talk to me afterward; and talking to me afterward, as I was fully prepared to demonstrate, is never a good way to start your day. And nobody had better give me any regulatory drivel about "right of way" either; you want to pull out your little rule books, I might show you a few rules you never heard of. Three healthy limbs sawn off a tree—for absolutely no reason.

And I knew how this stuff worked—you don't teach school without learning how these things work: It's a matter of incremental aggression, beginning with something so deliberately small that you'll look like a fool if you complain and ending with something so outrageously nasty that you'll feel like a fool that you didn't. So much for that bit about choosing your battles. The battle I choose is every single battle that chooses me, and I fight to win every last one. Go on, tell me it's only three limbs off a tree. I want somebody to tell me it's only three limbs off a tree. How about if I break only three limbs on an idiot? God, was I mad!

God . . . was I mad?

I am a descendant of angry men. My father had a temper. I used to help him work on his cars, and it was rare that we could finish a job without at least one minor flare-up. It was just as rare that we closed the hood with hard feelings. My father once confided to my mother, who wisely shared his confidence with me: "Gary could tell me to go screw myself, but I would still know he loved me." It was the truth. It had been the truth for men in our family before either of us was born.

Go on, tell me it's only three limbs off a tree. I want somebody to tell me it's only three limbs off a tree. How about if I break only three limbs on an idiot? God, was I mad!

My great-grandfather, a Dutch Reformed minister, is said to have cursed his Heavenly Father following the deaths of his wife and two young daughters from tuberculosis. He is also said to have refused to sign a doctrinal confession affirming the damnation of all heathen souls. Though after long wanderings he returned to the pulpit (first crossing the Atlantic to the United States) and though it's doubtful he ever lost his faith (one doesn't curse what one doesn't believe to exist), the image of his clenched fist shaken in the face of heaven, and perhaps in the faces of his seminary too, has long been with me.

So have the stories of his son, my grandfather and namesake, another angry ancestor I never knew. One day he came home from work to discover a neighbor had conveniently emptied the contents of his cesspool next to the sand pile where his son and daughter played across the street. My grandfather threatened to hoist the neighbor up by his ankles if every trace of filth was not removed within 24 hours. "And when you're finished, you cheap Holland bastard," roared the minister's son, "you get on your knees and pray."

The phrase *Dutch temper* and the phrase *cheap Holland bastard*—uttered by a Hollander no less—are two signifiers of my heritage, a patrimony passed with fiery love from father to son. They are not the only signifiers, however. Life would be too easy if they were. My first reading of the Gospels was from a New Testament presented by my great-grandfather to my father when my parents were first married. That too was part of the same heritage, and it ensured that my Dutch temper could seldom exist without Christian remorse, nor Christian meekness without some inner resistance. The story of my journey in faith has often amounted to the story of my struggle with anger.

I am writing about anger for at least three specific reasons. All of them are

vividly personal, though I trust they are no less common than anger itself.

1. My anger has often seemed out of proportion—that is, too great or too little, but more often too great—for the occasion that gave rise to it.

2. My anger has more often distressed those I love and who love me than it has afflicted those at whom I was angry.

3. My anger has not carried me far enough toward changing what legitimately enrages me. In fact, the anger often saps the conviction.

It's fair to say that I am writing not only about anger but also in anger. In other words, anger is in some ways my inspiration as well as my subject. I can give three reasons for that as well.

First, I have grown increasingly impatient with the blithe reductionism of the so-called self-help movement. I have grown impatient at seeing the laudable idea that life is a series of struggles to be undertaken—or questions to be asked or burdens to be borne—replaced with the idea that life is essentially a set of problems to be solved by the adoption of the right program (spiritual or electronic) or the purchase of the right product (pharmaceutical or electronic).

I have also grown increasingly angry at our full-bellied acquiescence to social and economic injustice. I'm referring to the notion that everything other than the perfectible self is too vast and complex to admit to any remedy whatsoever, and that our best course of (in)action lies in ironical detachment or in the cultivation of an abrasive attitude that delivers some of the release, but packs none of the punch, of well-aimed rage. Our advertising and even our arts convey the idea that we as a society are brash, irreverent, and free of all constraint, when the best available evidence would suggest that we are in fact tame, spayed, and easily brought to heel.

And finally, I am writing in petulant resistance to the idea that anger is an emotion with no rightful place in the life of a Christian or in the emotional repertoire of any evolved human being. Darwinian evolution I can buy; most of the other forms, however, I can neither buy nor stomach. Darwin saw us linked with the animals, and therefore to the material creation as a whole; so do the Old and New Testaments. But the popular theology (most of it Gnostic) that portrays perfection as the shedding of every primitive instinct, and portrays God as an impersonal sanitizing spirit, is to my mind evidence of a satanic spirit. The Lord my God is a jealous God and an angry God, as well as a loving God and a merciful God. I am unable to imagine one without the other. I am unable to commit to any Messiah who doesn't knock over tables.

If more of us need to be angry, then it follows that we shall require a more careful application of anger.

A few years ago I told a dear friend that I was going to write a book someday for angry men and women. "I think there need to be more of them," he quipped. I'm inclined to agree. But if he's right, if more of us need to be angry, then it follows that we shall require a more careful application of anger and a finer discernment of when anger applies.

I never did go to the town garage the morning after I found those three sev-

ered tree limbs. That night as I sat at the kitchen table correcting final exams, I began to hear a noise "as of a rushing wind" but of such an immediate and dreadful intensity that I could not at first be certain it was the wind. I remember fixing my eyes on one of the dark windowpanes, which seemed about to shatter, and thinking that the force outside could not possibly increase. It increased. I did not think I was dying, but the unreal sensation of those moments must be what it is like suddenly to realize that you are about to die. The rain was falling too hard. The next crack of thunder might be louder than we could bear. The lights snapped off. The roof sounded as though it were being ripped from the house.

I rushed my wife and our year-old daughter into the basement and then foolishly went upstairs to see what was happening and what I could do, which of course was nothing. Within a few minutes, the worst of the storm had passed. The rain subsided enough for me to see through the windows. One of the maple trees in our yard was snapped in two. Moving to the front windows, I saw to my horror that half of the roof of our large barn across the road was gone, rafters and steel together.

For the next three days we were without electric power. Two-hundred-year-old maple trees and limbs the size of telephone poles lay across the road for more than a mile. The central path of the storm—and there is still disagreement more than a decade later as to whether it was a small tornado or simply a thunderstorm with a terrific downdraft—crossed the road about a quarter mile from our house and cut a swath of toppled trees and peeled roofs that extended through an entire county and beyond. Despite the commotion we had heard, our house roof was spared. But 20- foot-square sections of steel and beam from the barn lay hundreds of yards behind our house in a hay field. They had been torn from the barn and blown over the house. They might just as easily have been blown through it.

How puny my three limbs seemed in comparison to such carnage. And how puny my anger seemed in comparison to such fury. It was difficult for me not to think of them as related in some way, as temptation and warning, as sin and punishment, even as the psychological cause of a meteorological effect. Or as I've since come to think of them, as a man's paltry anger defused by God's tremendous mercy.

I took my chain saw out to the road and began to cut one of the massive limbs that lay across it. One of the road crew drove up, rolled down his window, and thanked me for saving him some work. Had he gotten out of his car, I would have thrown my arms around him.

—*Garret Keizer is the author of* No Place But Here: A Teacher's Vocation in a Rural Community, *and* A Dresser of Sycamore Trees: The Finding of a Ministry, *as well as a novel,* God of Beer. *He lives in northeastern Vermont with his wife and daughter. This essay is excerpted with permission of the publisher Jossey-Bass, a Wiley company, from Keizer's new book,* The Enigma of Anger: Essays on a Sometimes Deadly Sin.

What Amos Might Rant About (Or Not) Today

Testing Anger as Resource

Michael A. King

In some ways, at least for now, Garret Keizer's article (immediately preceding this one) transformed my life. It was because I was so taken with it, and hoped other readers would be, that I made the effort as *DSM* editor to track down its original owner and pay to reprint it. What caught my attention was its focus on the "enigma of anger," as Keizer puts it, pointing to his own complex and enigmatic relationship to this force through which he knows he both destroys and is inspired to do good things.

I too could tell stories of my own unproductive relationship with anger. Perhaps most famous in my immediate family is the time, happily now a good many years ago, when after a ghastly experience buying new tires put on hours late by bumblers, I came home shot through with rage. I picked up a chair in our bedroom (old and already cracked; a hint of rationality remained) and slammed it down so hard it shattered. The experience put me so close to the raw power of anger and what it could have done if I had turned it on

a person that I have not again let myself express it so nakedly. In fact various healings in my life journey have made such rage, if not entirely unknown, blessedly less frequent than back then.

I would not want to unlearn what I know about anger's power to destroy; often we need lessons in anger control, not appreciation. Yet as one who grew up in a tradition that emphasized nonviolence and tended to equate anger itself with violence, I suspect I still have lessons to learn from the other side of the enigma Keizer sketches out for us, which is that he is drawing on its fuel precisely as he writes his article and convincingly makes the case that much of what is wrong with our so often unjust society calls not for inaction but for "well-aimed rage."

I want to do what I have rarely deliberately and consciously done: write in anger.

And so having pondered Keizer, I want to do two things: first, I want to do what I have rarely deliberately done: write in anger. Certainly I have written in anger before, but not in a conscious effort to test what insights anger can bring. Second, at a time when it seems to me my culture, that of the United States, is particularly living on the edge—between a carefree affluence and the sense of threat that now hangs over our ability to live as we have—I want to aim the anger in one of the directions Keizer calls for, that of wrong values.

I want to join a Keizer-inspired exploration of what anger can do with what seems to me a prime example of this in the Bible: the anger of the prophet Amos. Reading Amos after Keizer, I was struck by how angry Amos must have been back then. Furiously he told a nation sometimes strikingly like ours—often comfortably wealthy, complacent, sure that so much Amos was prepared to call into question was just the way things were and should be—just how wrong things were and how disastrously they would come apart not too long after.

I don't claim God has told me to say what I'm about to say; I claim only the fallible insights of anger. I don't know what will happen next in North America. But I do believe that along with whatever inspiration God offered him, anger provided Amos with strikingly accurate insights into a nation which did indeed not long after fall to pieces in much the way he had forecast. So I will at least test what likewise comes from my angry spirit as Keizer provides the inspiration for me to try its release and Amos the inspiration for the targets of its release.

What took me in the first place to Amos after Keizer started me thinking about anger was the memory of that rage-filled line from Amos, "Hear this, you cows of Bashan who . . . oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to their husbands, 'Bring something to drink!'" I would be considered to have gone far beyond constructive anger if I were to forecast in today's cultural terms the equivalent of what Amos predicts for those who, wallowing in obscene luxury, clamor for ever lower taxes while forty mil-

lion Americans go to bed each night aware they dare not get sick because they lack health coverage. This in a nation that says spending a hundred billion or two on war should pose no economic problem but fixing the health crisis can't be done.

On and on Amos rages, wanting nothing to do with buzz concepts like denominational transformation, missional congregations, contemporary or good old traditional worship styles, if the people who foster them just do their complacent self-indulgent thing while around them the suffering rises.

So without claiming to be sure these are the exact parallels Amos would rage about if here today, what might at least be potential examples?

Manicured Lawns

I have never heard lawn care raised as a test of membership nor, as pastor, am I about to start. But from everything I can tell, the North American practice of maintaining as manicured lawns stretches of land cumulatively vast enough to house entire nations is an abomination—precisely the type of taken-for-granted-of-course-it's-a-good-thing horror Amos hated. The damage done to ecosystems by our motorized and chemical intrusions into God's good earth to create artificial swaths of outdoor carpet is apparently nearly incalculable.

Oh, I too have a lawn. But over the years I have let more forest grow at its edges. And I refuse the chemical applications that make some neighbors' yards resemble golf courses—meaning just about nothing God originally put there will grow in it. I don't have the guts to stop growing a lawn, but I hope a century from now we will have learned enough about the damage lawns do that instead of taking them for granted as a sign of good citizenship we will point fingers at those who still stubbornly maintain them.

SUVs

I have nothing original to say anymore against SUVs; happily others have beaten me to it. I *will* confess to being pleased that enough Christians have finally felt enough rage about countless Americans hurtling along in their gas-wasting, CO^2-spewing behemoths of steel that they recently made headlines to the effect that God hates SUVs. I bet God does; I do too.

Housing Developments

Until weeks ago the hillside two fields over was a Salford township field long farmed. First the developer wanted to put hundreds of homes on it. When a bunch of us stirred ourselves to protest, the good news was that the developer had to pare his dreams to 35 homes. The bad news is that I can hear them now, the bulldozers tearing off the topsoil to make way for the lawns that will instead prevail in this new haven now called, dear God, "The Preserve at Salford."

Denominational Organizations

My ire so far has targeted primarily larger cultural issues. But in Amos' day, nation and people of God were much the same thing, and the people of God were who got blasted. So if one is to emulate Amos' anger, one must include the church as target.

I believe denominational organizations do many good things. But in recent months I have had contact with stories about two different denominational organizations, their entire reason for existing supposedly being to pursue various forms of Christian mission, which have chosen to do things to people of a sort which if one person did it to another would be considered beyond the pale. You just don't treat people that way if you want to be able to claim to be a Christian.

The financial woes which forced these organizations into hard choices are understandable; the making of the choices is not the issue. But apparently because leaders of such organizations need not look individuals in the eye and can sit in boardrooms making decisions without directly facing those affected, they endorse implementing hard decisions in ways so harsh that if I used them against a congregational member, I might be disciplined. Organizations that do not implement hard choices in ways that respect the basic vulnerability, dignity, and humanity of the real people affected enrage me.

Ideologues

I am sick of hearing stories of people not allowed to teach and think freely at Christian universities if they do not toe precisely the denominational line on a given issue. Martin Luther did not toe the lines of his day. Menno Simons, for whom Mennonites are named, was from the vantage point of his original Catholic "denomination" a renegade priest. How then today does God similarly bring new light if any effort to think beyond present convictions is heretical?

Likewise I am sick of the reformers also so sure of their new light that they persecute denominational leaders, university administrators, writers, or any figures who catch their eye, as traitors to the cause of righteousness whenever their object of scorn shows signs of not believing precisely what the prophets do.

Eek. I wonder how well I would have liked Martin Luther, Menno Simons, Amos. Parts of them would have thrilled me. But often their relentlessly self-assured certainty that what they were rejecting was wrong and they entirely right would have itself enraged me. It occurs to me that in this column, theirs is the camp I have joined.

I am glad I did; I learned much from them and am convinced they have much to teach me about the constructive power of anger. I still believe in what I have just preached. There are about 20 other abominations yet I could vent my spleen on.

But I have spent my anger. There is a time for it, but it can only take me so far. I am, in the end, a human being, nearly always implicated in what I have scorned, as riddled with complexities and contradictions as the people whose choices I have just judged. Let me now offer them mercy—and ask for theirs.

—*Michael A. King, Telford, Pennsylvania, is pastor, Spring Mount (Pa.) Mennonite Church; and editor,* DreamSeeker Magazine.

The Basketball Push

Marshall V. King

I pushed back. Peacemakers aren't supposed to.

In a rush of anger, coupled with poor judgment, I shoved a guy on the basketball court recently. As soon as he reacted with anger of his own and dismay, I felt remorse. I was embarrassed—no, even stronger than that. I was ashamed.

Sports have a way of stripping away the rules with which we live out our emotions. In college, a Mennonite pastor, who was competitive as well as being a good preacher, stayed with me during a seminary Pastor's Week. We watched an Indiana University basketball game together. In that basement apartment, he yelled and probably even cursed at the television as players and officials participated in this game.

I was marked by that. A man I respected felt free to carry on about this game. Somehow, that validated such carrying on for me.

I already had a long history of carrying on when it came to games, particularly basketball. When I wasn't broadcasting games on the campus radio station, I enjoyed sitting near center court on the floor and filling the referee's ears as he ran up and down the floor. One even growled that if I didn't sit down, I'd be kicked out of the gym. I remembered that "cheering" recently as I heard Goshen College students hollering at Eastern

Mennonite University soccer players during a game between the two. They weren't shouting blessings. I've heard a number of adults at sporting events, from Little League to college games, follow similar patterns.

Surely we all protest too much at times. In one game, a teammate once tackled me because I reacted either to a referee's call or lack of one, and my friend was sure I was headed for an untimely technical foul.

To be sure, we don't always yell at someone. My senior year of high school, in the boys' basketball sectional tournament, I led the wave and generally screamed—mostly in support of our team, some against the rival—until I was hoarse and we won in double overtime. There wasn't much voice to cheer with the next night when the mighty Falcons almost came back from a 16-point deficit with 1:30 left to tie the game. The final shot fell short and we lost by 3.

In a baseball game growing up, playing with the same guys I cheered on the basketball court, I once waved a baseball in the runner's face after I'd caught the throw that put him out at first base. Mr. McCumons, one of our coaches and my sixth-grade teacher, gave me a tongue-lashing I've never forgotten. You don't show up another player. You play hard, with dignity and grace, and you never ever flaunt your own skills.

Sports in general, but particularly basketball, awaken passion in me. I love these games, either watching or playing. To me, basketball is a nearly perfect game involving finesse and some skills as you work toward fitness individually and toward scoring baskets and preventing them as a team.

I've become more aware of the passion sports invoke as I see it reflected through a spouse's eyes. I've assured her I won't throw the remote again when the Hoosiers lose. I've tried to mollify my expressions from the recliner as I watch sports on television.

For nearly 15 years, men from my church have played basketball. I joined in about 10 years ago. Someone invited me and I never stopped going. This group, this game, in a roundabout way marked my life.

It's probably because of this group I continued attending the church that I'm a part of. After college, in that year of searching for a community in my hometown, I landed at a church which wasn't an automatic fit for me. But the guys played basketball on Saturdays that winter and that was more important than what happened Sunday mornings.

I went to both. One was church for me. The other was a service where people sang and talked about what was happening in the world. The Sunday morning service became church too, but it took a while.

Without being sexual, there's an intimacy among men as they play a game together. In these Saturday morning gatherings, I find easy laughter and grace as we foul each other and draw oxygen and water from the same sources. We experience community as we play together.

Players have come and gone. Some moved away. Some switched churches. Others returned back from

service assignments or stints abroad. New players heard about it and joined in. The game has gone on at 7:00 A.M. Saturdays for years.

I think often of the Indonesian man in an exchange program who played with us one winter. He had little sense of the game—or of English. But he transferred what he knew about soccer to basketball, and we all enjoyed playing together. I remember the joy so evident on his face. We were all smiling on his last morning as we paused beneath a basket for a group picture.

As I remember that smile, I wonder how often joy is evident on my face, particularly as I'm playing. And I wonder about my passions. Does my passion for following Christ run as deep as the passion for following a fast break down a hardwood floor? I don't always know. Running a floor is usually less complicated than the walk of a Christian, but they can't be separated.

What does it mean that I am quick to anger? How do I use the passion in ways that bring joy. . . ?

When I pushed the guy a couple weeks ago in a pick-up game, it was out of frustration at being run into repeatedly. A push-back was memorable, but a few words would have accomplished the same thing without creating a scene or diminishing the fun of the game as happened for all 10 guys on the floor that morning.

Better choices are usually most obvious on the other side of a poor one. So without beating myself up, I live with knowing I pushed this man as he ran into me. I live with his reaction that morning but also his forgiveness. His forgiveness came fairly quickly, and we've resolved the tension. But my questions about myself, my tendencies, even my possibilities, don't end.

What does it mean that I am quick to anger? How do I respond gracefully when a flood of anger and emotion courses through the center of this big body? How do I use the passion in ways that bring joy rather than dismay and a few well-timed curses?

I try to live as a peacemaker. I try to bridge differences between people. I also have to own that on the basketball court, when passion pounds through the blood vessels along with the extra blood being pumped by this heart, there is a tendency to be something other than gracious and kind.

That's when playing the game is more than just running up and down a hardwood floor and making cuts. That's when it becomes part of living. To live so we are gracious even when passions run deep is the truest challenge of our self-control.

In the locker room, after a morning of basketball, one player noted that at our age playing isn't about winning or losing, it's just about the competition. That's the lesson. This isn't a serious game. It's just a game to be played hard and enjoyed. I wish I had learned that lesson better years ago.

—Marshall V. King, a journalist and writer, lives and hoops it up in Goshen, Indiana. He pulls for the Hoosiers, who play basketball the way God intended, particularly with a coach less prone to outbursts than Bobby Knight.

On Learning How to Think

Why Coming Face to Face with Being Human Is to Begin the Dangerous Road to Truth

Christian Early

Good education trains students to reflect critically on their religious convictions. It does this by giving students a safe environment in which to consider the possibility that their deeply held convictions may need revision. Good education is a dangerous activity because students often respond in very human patterns of fight, flight, or freeze.

The reason for this is quite simply that our set of convictions is who we are; if they need revision, it means that we will change. Convictions are different from mere beliefs at exactly that point. Having a conviction is not a matter of merely accepting this or that to be true about the world; it is a matter of identity. This places educational institutions in a very delicate position because what goes on in the classroom is the formation of a student's character. At the very least, it takes a tremendous amount of courage to be a student.

Consider this example. Biblical scholars have discovered that the canonical text not only tells a story; it also has a story. This discovery suggests that the Bible

is perhaps not so much a monological dictation from God as it is a dialogical conversation among the people of God about what God is like. We take that discussion to be inspired. Scripture is, in short, very human.

This suggestion may lead some to conclude (I believe wrongly) that the Bible can no longer be trusted to tell us anything true about God. The Bible becomes a human construction—poetic fiction. Why is this conclusion not necessary? Because it is possible that to recognize our humanity is at the same time to take the very first step on the road to seeing God. Said differently, the narrative of education can take on the pattern of the narrative of Jesus such that to be a student is to be a disciple.

*I*t may be helpful here to consider the testimony of the great Christian poet Dante Alighieri. Dante (1265-1321) didn't much care for the reigning sacred versus secular dualisms of his day. For him, of course, it was the right of poetry—even romantic poetry—to tell truth. The judgment of the church at that time was that poetry was at best harmless fantasy and at worst a gate to all things depraved.

Against this, Dante presents a vision of poetry within theology. His great work, the *Comedy*, is thus a model for those of us who want to be real and honest about our feelings and thoughts. That is, it teaches us how to be poetic and to have that human authenticity and honesty be integral to our journey to the vision of God. And so he has Virgil, a secular poet, and lovely Beatrice, a well-known character in romantic poetry (we might even call her sexy), guide him to God.

Dante starts his *Comedy* this way: "Midway through the journey of our life, I found myself in a dark wood, for I had strayed from the straight pathway to this tangled ground." In this place of being at once lost and afraid, he sees Virgil, who having heard Dante's desire to flee the woods, promises to guide him on to sacred paradise. But the road will force Dante to face dangers greater even than those of the woods. Going through hell, Dante will have to face the dangers that lie in his own self.

As they reach the gates of hell—above which is a cheerful sign saying "Abandon hope all you who enter"—Dante, seized by doubt, asks Virgil to "weigh whether I am fit for what lies in wait before you entrust me to the path ahead." Virgil calms Dante's fears and in a moment of trust, Dante enters hell, embarking on a journey of self-discovery as he comes face to face with those who are being punished.

They go through days of literal and figurative journeying, and at some point it dawns on those of us reading the story that we too, by the very fact of reading *this* story, are journeying with them. We too must follow the voice of poetry and face the dangers of our own selves if we are to ascend, as Dante does, to paradise to see God.

Dante presents a vision of intellectual and emotional mentoring as a journey to God. I am tempted to call it "therapy as worship," in that coming to terms with our human reasoning and feeling is a step toward true worship of God. But it is not an independent journey; it is a guided journey in which we accept the role of the disciple.

Dante reminds us there may come a time when we find ourselves lost in the dark woods of our lives and that to see God requires us to trust others. In this way, the pattern of the story of Jesus of Nazareth, at once human and divine, is the pattern of education. True human education finds its point and purpose in theology. Dante would be more blunt: We cannot truly come to know God without human formation.

*W*hat does this mean for Christian education today? Facing our humanity will uncover at least two areas of inadequacy. Genetics and neuroscience yield evidence that the genetic make-up of human beings has a pervasive influence on character and that the brain seems to be doing the work traditionally attributed to the soul. As our understanding of human function increases, it will become urgent to revise the traditional account of people as composed of body and soul to account for the scientific data.

Christian education asks students to set out on a self-revealing journey because it is the way to see God amid the strong urge to fight, flee, or freeze.

There is also growing awareness of the religious diversity present in the world. Students who go on mission trips overseas or take world religion classes have begun to wonder why Christianity is assumed true and other religions assumed false. They ask questions about the justice of eternal punishment for having been born in a culture that is not predominately Christian. They ask questions about truth and the reality of religious experience within other religions that the traditional exclusivist account cannot satisfactorily answer.

There are limits to revisions we can explore and remain faithful to the Christian tradition. In particular, it won't work to adopt a materialism that makes impossible meaningful talk about morality. Nor will it work to adopt a religious relativism that makes impossible meaningful talk about truth.

The fact that some revisions cannot work is precisely the feature necessary for Christians to claim they have discovered that their convictions are true. Those intellectual boundaries provide grounds for maintaining that the God of the Christian story is the God of the world. But to say this is to accept the dangers involved in revising our current convictions. Dante, in short, is right.

I am proposing that facing the inescapable reality of our human nature and nurture will highlight areas of inadequacy in traditional Christian understandings of the human being—the rightness of our way of life and the truth of our religious convictions—and that this awareness transports us into Dante's poetic world. In the plotline of the *Comedy*, we can locate ourselves somewhere between feeling lost in the woods and wondering if we have the courage to enter hell. Christian education asks students to set out on a self-revealing journey because it is the way to see God amid the strong urge to fight, flee, or freeze. Those urges are real, but so are the rewards for those with the courage to embark on the dangerous road to truth.

—*Christian Early, Harrisonburg, Virginia, is Associate Professor of Philosophy and Theology, Eastern Mennonite University.*

Remembering the Future

September 11 and War with Iraq

J. Denny Weaver

September 11, 2001, is seared in our memories. If people are asked where they were when they heard the news, virtually everyone remembers. This remembering continues. Likely few people have experienced a day since then without references to September 11, along with ever-present admonitions to remember victims and heroes of that day. One thing is clear. We *should* remember 9-11. But how and what we remember matters. That remembering foretells our future.

We do need to remember the victims of 9-11. But properly remembering means knowing what makes a victim. A victim is someone who does not control his or her fate. News reports listed nearly 3,000 victims on 9-11. These people were going about their business on that morning, just like all of us now reading this article. Then with no warning and beyond their power to imagine or control, planes crashed and buildings fell on them. The people in the planes and the twin towers of the Trade center were victims, and it is appropriate to remember them and their families.

But complete remembering requires seeing what produced those victims. The events of 9-11 that killed

those victims are symptoms and products of a wider belief that threatens to engulf all of us. This wider belief is the assumption that violence will solve problems of injustice.

I write as a Christian pacifist—who believes that Jesus' rejection of the sword, of violence, is a revelation of God's reign and a call to all who would live as followers of Jesus under God's rule. I also believe that if and when one accepts the truth of that rule, one can perceive the truth of the rejection of violence in events of the world around us. From the perspective of God's peaceable kingdom, it is clear that we are in the grip of an ongoing cycle of violence, with each act of violence serving to justify the next round by the other side.

The important point is to see that the people who perpetrate violent acts on both sides are captive to a fatal belief that more violence will end the cycle.

The perpetrators of 9-11 were convinced violence would teach "those Americans" a lesson for their many deeds and policies deemed unjust. But the American acts for which 9-11 was retaliation were already themselves acts and policies of violence in response to other violent acts. Americans, following the lead of the administration in Washington, continue to believe that an innocent nation was attacked out of jealousy on 9-11.

That claim of innocence ignores a number of items. A brief list starts with the economic violence the United States inflicts on developing nations of the world when an estimated 25-40 percent of the world's wealth and resources are sucked into the U.S. to be consumed by four percent of the world's population. Such economic violence takes on particular significance when one confronts the fact that the U.S. continues to give Israel nearly $6 billion yearly (with efforts in congress to increase that figure) while funds sent to Palestinians flow at the level of a comparative pittance.

This U.S.-sponsored economic violence accompanies other violence. This violence appears as the tacit approval given by the U.S. to the expansion of settlements in the occupied West Bank and Gaza, which means ongoing confiscation of Palestinian land and demolition of Palestinian houses, as well as the clear support that the U.S. has given to Israel's destruction of towns, road closures, and curfews lasting weeks at a time imposed on the residents of the West Bank. These acts of violence the U.S. has supported were all carried out with the purpose of stopping terrorism and punishing terrorists.

The point is that in no case did any of these acts of violence by either side teach the other side a lesson; violence did not work for either side. What each act of violence did, whether small or large, direct or systemic, was to provoke more acts of violent retaliation. And it does not matter whether an observer enters the cycle at an act by a Palestinian sympathsizer or at an act of the U.S.-Israeli axis. The key point is to see that the people who per-

petrate violent acts on both sides are captive to a fatal belief that more violence will end the cycle. None of this violence convinced either side to stop its violence. In fact, it simply creates more angry people who wait for another opportunity at violent revenge.

On October 7, 2001, the United States initiated a violent response to September 11. More people have now been killed in Afghanistan as a result of October 7 than were killed 9-11. Those who died in Afghanistan, such as those killed by American fighter planes at a misdiagnosed wedding reception, were also victims of this cycle of violence. U.S.-sponsored violence has not solved the problems involved or convinced the other side to stop its own violence. In Afghanistan there was a regime change, but we still hear about bombs and assassination attempts and fighting between warlords in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

And for all of the activity of this country's "war on terrorism," people in the United States do not feel safer. In fact, our media reflect ongoing fear and the expectation of another round of retaliation. American violence has simply continued the cycle and provoked more hatred and more calls for revenge that will keep the cycle going.

We should remember the victims of 9-11. We should also remember other things. We should remember that there are more victims than those who died on 9-11. There were victims of violence before 9-11—and those victims, of whichever side, are victims of the same cycle of violence that produced 9-11. Remember the events following 9-11, the violence since October 7 that has extended the cycle of violence and increased fears of more retaliation.

Such memories show us the result of the proposed war with Iraq—a major continuation of the cycle of violence. As many historians can now locate the beginning of World War II in the humiliating Treaty of Versailles imposed on Germany by the victors of World War I, even now the cycle of violence that encompasses Palestine-Israel and 9-11 and Iraq contains the seeds of more revolutions of this violent cycle in the future beyond the next proposed war with Iraq.

The cycle continues because people make decisions that advance the cycle. The cycle could stop if people made other choices. Last September for First Year Seminar, all new students at Bluffton College read Leslie Marmon Silko's beautiful novel *Ceremony.* In it, the cycle of violence, which Silko called "witchery," appears graphically. And the narrative of *Ceremony* shows how the main character, Tayo, found the resources in Native American spirituality to escape from the cycle of violence.

If this nation does not escape from the cycle of violence, the memory of the past victims and past violent events will be our future as well. If things continue as they are going, the future is already here—and it looks like our memories of victims and of violence from 9-11 and October 7. I do not like those memories.

If we do not like those memories, we need to envision a different future. The way to that different future is to begin *now* to stop the cycle of violence. Contrary to popular belief, war is not inevitable. War happens because a leader makes a decision to call for it, and elsewhere other leaders and people in the street make their individual decisions to accept the call to war. But those individuals could all choose not to follow. War is not inevitable. It happens because people decide for it. If people refused to play follow the leader, war would stop.

Peace people and the peace church have a public role to play in this national choice. Our Christian witness should be that God's reign opposes violence. Part of that witness is to pose alternatives in the political realm that reflect the truth of nonviolence as revealed in God's reign.

Two suggestions: First, the U.S. should build houses for the 3 million or so Afghan refugees created when the Taliban, as a U.S. protégé, fought the Russian invasion of Afghanistan. (In the Afghan economy, building houses for the entire refugee population would cost only a fraction of the money already committed by Congress for the "war on terrorism")

Second, the U.S. should redirect half of the $6 billion given yearly to Israel and use the redirected money to rebuild Palestinian houses and infrastructure destroyed by recent Israeli invasions and occupation. Such actions would do much to lessen the hatred that fuels terrorist acts against the U.S., and that in turn would materially change the equation that continues the cycle of violence.

But what are the roles of peace people and the peace church when such suggestions go unheeded—as seems to be the case with the current administration in Washington? When war comes—as is appearing too likely—we still have a public role. We are still called to testify that the rule of God opposes violence. The church is still called to live as a visible, peaceful, and just manifestation of the reign of God breaking into the world. That is an important witness about the character of Christian faith, and it will belie the belief of many people in the Middle East that violence appears intrinsic to Christian faith. (If violence is not intrinsic to Christian faith, why do so many people calling themselves Christians support violence?)

The unheeded suggestions also serve an important, public role. The presence of such suggestions, which could be multiplied almost infinitely, serve to show that war is not inevitable and that war is far from the last resort, which is one of the criteria for a justifiable war.

The Christian calling of the peace church is just that—to be a peace church. And the peace church and peace people should remember 9-11 and October 7. But the real question is whether we remember 9-11 and October 7 in ways that envision a violent future or a peaceful future.

—J. Denny Weaver, Bluffton, Ohio, teaches theology and ethics at Bluffton College. Recent books include Anabaptist Theology in Face of Postmodernity *(Pandora Press U.S., 2001) and* The Nonviolent Atonement *(Eerdmans, 2001). He is editor of the C. Henry Smith Series.*

Lincoln and the Civil War

Daniel Hertzler

When in the Course of Human Events, by Charles Adams. Rowman & Littlefield, 2000.

Lincoln, by David Herbert Donald. Simon & Schuster, 1995.

Phantoms of a Bloodstained Period, edited by Russell Duncan and David J. Klooster. University of Massachusetts Press, 2002.

For quite some time I have had doubts about Abraham Lincoln. Many persons seem to regard him as near to a saint. The legends include one where he is said to have walked several miles to return a few cents. He is presented as a kindly man who was decent to people who disagreed with him. His rhetoric in the Gettysburg address and the Emancipation Proclamation is held up for admiration.

My doubts about Lincoln developed slowly. They may have begun in response to the likenesses of Washington and Lincoln which dominated the front of my elementary school room. Without anyone in our family or church criticizing them, it eventually came to me that this man did not fit comfortably in our church

peace tradition. My view of Lincoln was not enhanced by the Ken Burns series on public broadcasting which highlights the death of 600,000 soldiers in the Civil War. But I guess I was waiting for something more specific. I believe I have found it in the book by Charles Adams.

All of history is interpreted history. Adams writes as one who learned the usual historical clichés but has dug more deeply and found some facts which his history teachers had not revealed to him. He begins by quoting the English author Charles Dickens, who identified the Civil War as a conflict over money. "We Northerners like to read about Lincoln the martyr and the dying god, but do we want to know about Lincoln the dictator who circumvented the Constitution to wage war on the South? His best generals would have a difficult time avoiding conviction by a war crimes tribunal according to the laws of that time for their plunder of Southern civilization" (3).

Adams . . . begins by quoting . . . Charles Dickens, who identified the Civil War as a conflict over money. "We Northerners like to read about Lincoln the martyr and the dying god, but do we want to know about Lincoln the dictator who circumvented the Constitution to wage war on the South?"

Adams adds on the same page that wars are typically "justified" for patriotic causes since, as he writes, soldiers would not rally for an economic war. Yet "the Civil War, like most wars, had a rational basis and was objectively grounded in the economic realities of the time. If the Gulf War in the 1990s was justified for economic reasons, so was the Civil War."

He asserts that the war did not begin as an effort to free the slaves. Slavery was well-protected by the federal government. And we remember that the Emancipation Proclamation was not announced until well into the war. The basic problem, says Adams, was tariffs. The North was strong in manufacturing. The South was not. Beginning in 1828, the government enacted tariffs which protected the northern manufacturing but caused hardship for the South which had to pay more for manufactured goods. If the southern states had been permitted to cut loose, they could have imported these goods from Europe at considerable savings.

Yet secession and violent resistance were tactical errors on the part of the South. The tariffs would have been a small matter in comparison with what they lost through the Civil War. This war "was a tragedy unparalleled in American history that has repercussions to this day" (29).

Adams describes at length Lincoln's assaults on civil liberties and the U.S. Constitution. The right of habeas corpus was suspended and "The Republican administration began making arrests based on unfounded rumors" (45). Ten thousand men were put in prison for opposing the war (52).

Lincoln's Gettysburg address, as Adams points out, was long on rhetoric, but as H. L. Mencken observed, "The Union soldiers in the battle actually fought against self-determination; it was the Confederates who fought for the right of their people to govern themselves" (199).

As for slavery, Adams says it was doomed anyhow, and the slaves would eventually have freed themselves had the North let them alone. So the Emancipation Proclamation also served as empty rhetoric.

What would have happened in the South if Lincoln had lived we will never know. It would seem that he would have surely been more generous than his successors were.

In any case, the results were disastrous. Adams reports that Robert E. Lee, the defeated Confederate General, said near the end of his life, "Had I foreseen these results of subjugation, I would have preferred to die at Appomattox with my brave men, my sword in my right hand" (219, 220).

I had an opportunity to show this book to Samuel Horst, a history teacher retired from Eastern Mennonite University. It surprised and did not fully convince him. But he implied that he would want to think about it further. Horst called my attention to the book *Lincoln* by David Donald, so I turned to it. It is written, the author says, "based largely on Lincoln's own words, whether in his letters and messages or in conversations recorded by reliable witnesses" (13).

Donald's book is much more comprehensive than the Adams book, following the life and career of Lincoln from beginning to end. Donald indicates that he "seeks to explain rather than to judge" (13) but on the next page he asserts that Lincoln had "an enormous capacity for growth, which enabled one of the least experienced and most poorly prepared men ever elected to high office to become the greatest American president" (14).

As the story unfolds, the reader cannot avoid emotional support for the cause of this unusual man who was born in poverty and seems to have lived most of his life just ahead of the bill collector. But he had intelligence and determination which enabled him to become a successful attorney and politician. Much of what Adams holds against Lincoln is identified by Donald but given a different interpretation. Characteristics of Lincoln highlighted early in the book help to account for why he functioned as he did after he became president.

Donald reports Lincoln's "fatalism" which he says was the source of "some of his most lovable traits: his compassion, his tolerance, his willingness to overlook mistakes" (15). He describes also Lincoln's belief in "predestination," which was a doctrine common in the theological atmosphere where he grew up. He did not adopt the doctrinal version or join the hairsplitting debates. "He felt more comfortable in thinking that events were foreordained by immutable natural laws than by a personal deity" (48).

This concept apparently fit well with his basic fatalism and guided his responses to the terrible issues thrust upon him. In a quotation from the year 1864 on the presentation page of the book, Lincoln says, "I claim not to have controled events, but confess plainly that events have controled me."

But Lincoln had several important convictions. It would appear that when events pushed him to act, these convictions also guided him. One was a belief in a protective tariff (109, 110). Another was opposition to slavery (176) and one more the preservation of the Union (192). When his Whig party died and the new Republican Party was organized as an anti-slavery party, Lincoln fell right in line.

Lincoln's statement about events controlling him was only half true. His own unwillingness to consider the southern states as any sort of valid entity separate from the Union and his unwillingness to negotiate with their emissaries surely prolonged the war. Donald recounts what is well known, that Lincoln had trouble finding competent generals. He finally settled on Grant, who won battles but lost thousands of his own men: 13,000 Union casualties at the battle of Shiloh (349) and 100,000 lost in a later six weeks of fighting (513).

Lincoln's bid for reelection was hampered by the difficulties in prosecuting the war. "Many considered him an inefficient administrator who tolerated looseness and inefficiency throughout the government. The best evidence was that, after two-and-a-half years of costly, bloody warfare, the 20 million loyal citizens of the North were unable to overcome 5 million rebellious white Southerners" (477).

Donald reports what Adams has also noted, that in the end Lincoln blamed the Almighty for the war. "If there was guilt, the burden had been shifted from his shoulders to those of a Higher Power. The war continued because 'the Almighty has His own purposes which are different from men's purposes.'" If this seems incredible, perhaps it may be accounted for by reference to Lincoln's personal fatalism and early orientation to theological predestination.

The Civil War was most assuredly based in part on miscalculations combined with blind determination on both sides. It was a tragedy that some of the most determined suffered less than the soldiers who volunteered or were drafted to fight. *Phantoms of a Bloodstained Period* represents the case of one of those who fought. The subtitle is "The Complete Civil War Writings of Ambrose Bierce."

Bierce was a volunteer from Indiana who signed up again after his first three months of volunteer service were completed. He stayed in the Union Army until January 1865, only months before the end of the war. The book is a compilation of disparate writings done over a period of years: some essays, some short fiction, some poetry.

It is not exactly a comprehensive presentation, but it provides flashes of insight based on experiences at the front. How he survived when more than 600,000 died is surprising. Evi-

dently he himself wondered about it. The first of the essays is titled "A Sole Survivor." He was finally wounded at Kennesaw Mountain after which doctors took a "lead ball from his skull," but he recovered to join the army again (11).

He became a writer and editor after the war, but his writings did not appear immediately. As the editors of the book observe, Americans were not yet ready for his point of view. When they came, his essays and stories covered the brutality and stupidity of the war. "The memory of the war as put forth by romantics and accepted by the American public incensed him." When he was asked "to write an accurate history of the war" his response was "The fools would probably not understand a word of it" (21).

Bierce was present at the battle of Shiloh Church where the Union Army lost 13,047 out of 62,000 men and the Confederates 11,694 out of 44,000. It is reported that "More Americans had been killed in two days at Shiloh than had died during the Revolution, War of 1812, and the Mexican War combined" (89).

His description of the battlefield which he visited on the day after is sickening. All the men found were dead except one, and he "lay face upward, taking in his breath in convulsive, rattling snorts, and blowing it out in sputters of froth which crawled creamily down his cheeks, piling itself alongside his neck and ears. A bullet had clipped a groove in his skull, above the temple; from this his brain protruded in bosses, dropping off in flakes and strings. I had not previously known one could get on, even in this unsatisfactory fashion, with so little brain" (103).

Later he describes a forest in which the dry leaves had caught fire and killed the wounded lying there; "scores of wounded who might have recovered perished in slow torture" (106). On one occasion, Bierce got leave to go into a ravine and inspect the remains of a regiment. Some he found "in the unlovely looseness of attitude denoting sudden death by bullet, but by far the greater number in postures of agony that told of the tormenting flame. . . . The contraction of muscles which had given them claws for hands had cursed each countenance with a hideous grin" (107).

In his own cynical realism Bierce reflected on the relative bravery of fighting men. "When two lines of battle are fighting face-to-face on even terms and one is ' forced back' (which always occurs unless it is ordered back) it is fear that forces it: the men could have stood if they had wanted to. . . . As a rule the Confederates fought better than our men. On even terms they commonly defeated us; nearly all our victories were won by superior numbers, better arms and advantages of position" (274).

These were the men who were constrained to face each other with guns in hand because of the miscalculations and rigidities of their elders. Most of the men were young. Bierce observes that the average age of the Union soldiers was no more than 25 and maybe only 23. Both sides sent out their most virile young men to kill and to be killed.

Many today seem to have a romantic fascination with the Civil War. There are reenactments in our area every year. This is all good fun, but I do not perceive that the slaughter is publicly acknowledged. I have never given the battle of Gettysburg a careful study. Maybe I should do so.

Also I have said to myself that the next time I'm in Washington I should visit the Vietnam Wall. It would be an opportunity to ponder the phenomenon of organized killing which continues unabated to this day. The Vietnam memorial is unique in that it includes the names of all Americans killed in the war. (What would Bierce say about that?)

From October 28 to November 10, 2002, Peter Eash Scott, Pittsburgh Mennonite Church pastoral intern, did a Peace Walk from Pittsburgh to Washington. It ended with a service at the Lincoln Memorial on the same day veterans was reading the names on the Vietnam Wall. Peter reported later that there was conversation between the two groups, and the peace people were able to assure the veterans that this was not a protest against their effort. It was rather a statement against the warlike bluster of the Bush Administration.

Not unlike predecessor Abraham Lincoln, George W. Bush has certain basic assumptions which make him unwilling to compromise. But now instead of the American union it is the American empire he must preserve.

—*Daniel Hertzler, Scottdale, Pennsylvania, writes a monthly column for the op ed page of the* Daily Courier *(Connellsville, Pa.) and has been a regular contributor of biblical background articles for* Builder *(a Christian education curricular guide slated to discontinue in May 2003). He is also author of* A Little Left of Center: An Editor Reflects on His Mennonite Experience *(DreamSeeker Books/Pandora Press U.S., 2000).*

Woman Finally Realizes Her Desk Is Down the Hall

"People kept giving me dirty looks," Rose Ellen says, with a bewildered look on her heart-shaped face, "and I had no idea why. It was awful!"

Ellen, it turns out, had spent two months working at a coworker's desk without realizing it.

"Oh! I just couldn't believe it!" she exclaims now, a good three months later. "To think that I had assumed this was my desk and then to find out it never, ever was. The horror of it was unimaginable. I shudder even now to think of it. Frankly, I was hoping you wouldn't use my real name in your article. Can you give me a fake name?"

Hastily assured that her identity will be protected, Ellen (whose fake name is simply a flip-flop of her real name) continues, describing the details of her unusual case.

"There isn't really much to say without making me look really bad," she says, "but if it will help anyone else who finds him or herself in a similar situation, I am willing to look really bad."

"I kept wondering who was always moving my pencils around and why I was getting phone messages and e-mails addressed to a woman named Susan, but I never put two and two together," she explains. "I learned to ignore this strange woman who always glared at me whenever she walked past my desk. I have a feeling now that her name is Susan. I was too traumatized to find out for sure if that's who she was, but it all fits together when I think about it now. And I'm telling you, I do not like to think about it any more than necessary. Can I go now?"

Ellen's sister, standing next to her for support during this interview, convinces her to continue for just a few more minutes, reminding her of her new mission. Ellen, after a moment of indecision, agrees.

She then says she wants to make sure others know what to do in similar situations. Most importantly, she says, she counsels people to ask around if they are unsure whether or not they are sitting at someone else's desk.

If I had only followed my sense of unease early on and inquired about it, I might well have discovered in just a few days that I was sitting at another woman's desk.

"Look, I know it's not always easy to ask in these situations, but it's a simple step that could end up saving your job life," she says. "I cannot emphasize enough how important this is. If I had only followed my sense of unease early on and inquired about it, I might well have discovered in just a few days that I was sitting at another woman's desk. In fact, I do not like to think too much even now about what could have been if I had only followed my gut feelings. It still upsets me more than I care to admit."

Ellen finally discovered her mistake, she says, one day upon returning from the restroom.

"I can barely describe this to you without shuddering, even now," she says, "but I know it is necessary so others will not follow in the same sad track. What happened is that I was coming back from the restroom one afternoon, at about 2:00. I believe it was a Tuesday. But when I went to sit in my chair, as I always did upon arriving at my desk, I sensed that my seat was considerably softer than it had been earlier that day.

"I tried to ignore it and get back to work, but my inquiring mind would not let it drop. So after about five minutes I began earnestly investigating my physical surroundings and discovered I was sitting in a woman's lap.

"At the same instant, a coworker walking past turned toward us—because us it was—and said, 'I'll need that in just a few minutes, Susan.' That's when the full horror dawned on me. I ran weeping from the area and have not returned since. There, that's the whole story. Please, can I go now?"

As she leaves her interview, Ellen discovers her VW Rabbit has been towed from where she parked it an hour earlier, in the chairman of the board's space.

—As circumstances warrant, through her Turquoise Pen column Noël R. King, Reston, Virginia, reports on strange and wonderful things, including the danger of borrowing another's desk.

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Or perhaps you already subscribe to *DreamSeeker Magazine* and are an author interested in being published in *DSM*, as a growing number of writers are. Then what? Indeed a key part of the *DSM* vision is to support the work of gifted writers—without whose inspired contributions the magazine of course could not exist. However, the limited space available in a quarterly magazine does not allow us routinely to accept unsolicited material. Thus we are not actively inviting submissions and are primarily publishing articles by our regular columnists and contributors or material we solicit. Nevertheless, we aim to treat unsolicited submissions respectfully and are happy that we *are* occasionally able to accept them, preferably by e-mail to *mking@CascadiaPublishingHouse.com* or to the Telford address above. (Note that unsolicited articles submitted by mail without SASE are unlikely to be returned.)

Although we are not actively soliciting articles, we do very much welcome feedback, including short letters for publication and occasional longer responses to articles.

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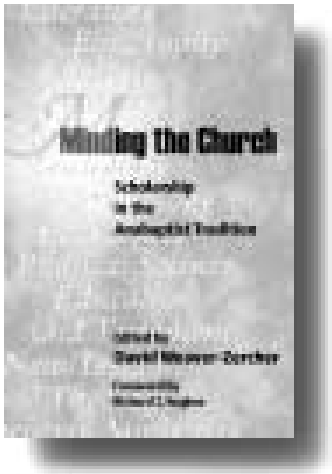
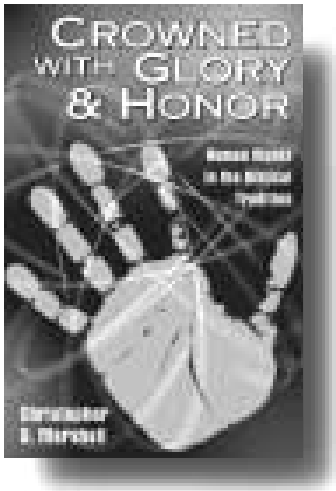


Minding the Church: Scholarship in the Anabaptist Tradition, ed. David Weaver-Zercher. "A valuable resource for understanding how Anabaptist scholars view their vocations today," affirms George Marsden. As they tell how their lives and scholarship intertwine, believes Richard J. Mouw, "The writers of these essays give convincing—and inspiring!—testimony to the power of the Anabaptist vision for the scholarly life." *6 x 9" trade paper, 280 p, $22.95 US/34.95 Can. Copublished with Lime Grove House, Auckland, New Zealand, as well as Herald Press.*



Crowned with Glory and Honor: Human Rights in the Biblical Tradition, Studies in Peace and Scripture Series 6, Chris Marshall. "Builds the bridge between the secular language of human rights and biblical perspectives on *shalom* that has been sorely lacking," says Mary Schertz. "A wonderful book," says Glen Stassen; "Enormously helpful to Christians who love 'the least of these.'" *5.5 x 8.5" trade paper, 160 p; $13.95 US/20.95 Can, copublished with Herald Press.*

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To Continue the Dialogue: Biblical Interpretation and Homosexuality, Living Issues Discussion Series 1, ed. C. Norman Kraus. "This kind of resource is the necessary beginning point for true discernment," says George R. Brunk III of these reasoned yet passionate calls for all who care about this issue to deliberate under the Spirit's guidance. *Authors:* Kraus, Richard Kauffman, Marcus Smucker, David Schroeder, Paul Lederach, Melanie Zuercher, Ed Stoltzfus, Lin Garber, Michael King, Don Blosser, Carl Keener, Douglas Swartzentruber, Ted Grimsrud, James Reimer, Reta H. Finger, Mark T. Nation, Carolyn Schrock-Shenk. *Respondents:* Brunk, John Lapp, Mary Schertz, Willard Swartley, Richard Showalter, Elsie and Don Steelberg, Elaine Swartzentruber. *6 x 9" tr. paper.; 332 p; $23.95 US/35.95 Can*

Fractured Dance: Gadamer and a Mennonite Conflict Over Homosexuality, C. Henry Smith Series 3, Michael A. King. "I applaud King for undertaking such a task, enabling us to see why in such a conversational dance people sometimes 'kick' each other. The book is brilliant, a great treat in philosophical hermeneutics," observes Willard M. Swartley in a review essay, *Mennonite Quarterly Review*. *6 x 9" tr. paper; 304 p; $22.95/33.95*

What Does the Bible Really Say about Hell? Wrestling with the Traditional View, Living Issues Discussion Series 2, by Randy Klassen, whose "voice is gentle and pastoral, says ***Publishers Weekly***, "as he analyzes reasons why many individuals need a belief in hell to scare them into heaven." Meanwhile Peter J. Dyck affirms the author for examining "carefully all significant references to hell in the Old and New Testaments." *5.5 x 8.5" tr. pap.; 144 p; $13.95/20.95*

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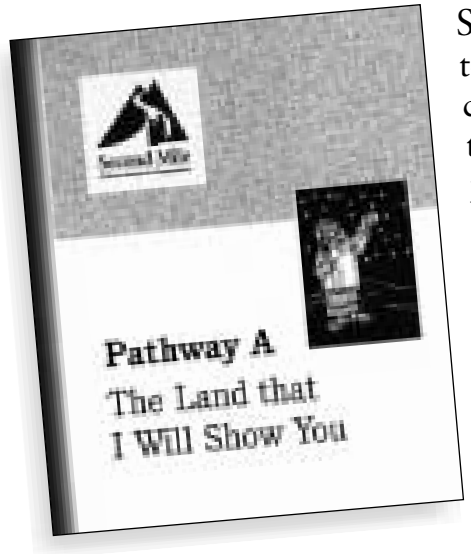

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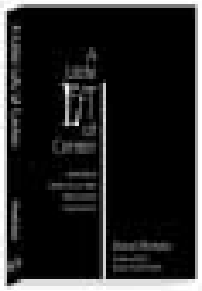

A Little Left of Center: An Editor Reflects on His Mennonite Experience,
by Daniel Hertzler. author in this issue of *DreamSeeker Magazine* of the column, "Books, Faith, World & More." In a *Little Left of Center*, says Wayne North, "Hertzler tells about life—his life, congregational life, and institutional life in the Mennonite Church. In his offhand yet direct style Hertzler lets us in on the fascinating, occasionally messy, yet richly rewarding story of his adventures from a Depression farm boy to the inner reaches of the Mennonite Church."
5.5 x 8.5" trade pap, 176 p, $13.95 US/20.95 Can
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The Merging: A Story of Two Families and Their Child
by Evelyn King Mumaw, author in this issue of *DreamSeeker Magazine* of the the article "When Death Announces Its Nearness" and of "The Happy Day"—an excerpt from *The Merging*, which James O. Lehman sees as "a family treasure. Rare is the person who can make the mighty leap from the present to an ancestor nine generations and 370 years earlier—and have information of his incarceration for his faith in an old castle—then build a bridge from Anabaptism to current American Mennonitism."
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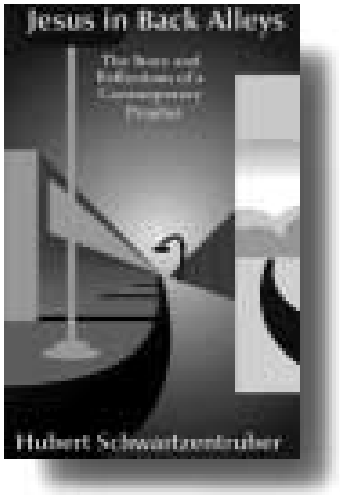

Jesus in Back Alleys: The Story and Reflections of a Contemporary Prophet,
Hubert Swartzentruber. "This gentle pastor who loves John Deere tractors, polishes pieces of colorful stone as gifts, listens long and hard, writes love poems to his wife Mary—this man offers few pat answers. He simply invites us to join the walk, in the company of Jesus and of the wounded ones in this world," says *Mary Lou Cummings*. "This is a dangerous book," warns *John K. Stoner*. "If you are comfortable in your prejudices and unshakeable in your dogmas, you might be well advised to avoid reading it. It could change you . . . and then what?"
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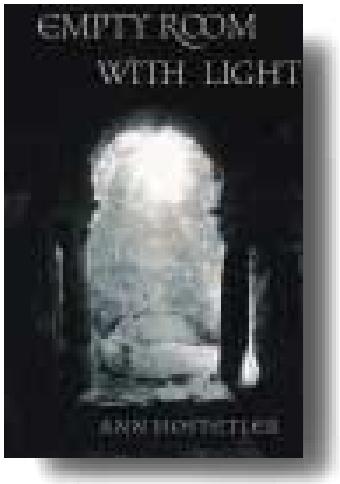

Empty Room with Light: Poems, by Ann Hostetler, who "combines her painter's eye with a sensitivity to language informed by her work as a literary scholar," says *Julia Kasdorf* and "turns family and its daily routines into poetry high mass, with all the garments, incense, and sensuality that often accompany ritual," notes *Susan Firer.* She adds, "Here a daughter traces the surface of her mother's bathwater with her fingertips; a son in blue nylon shorts and high tops helps iron napkins that turn into prayer flags."
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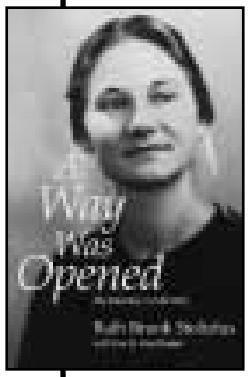

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Ruth Brunk Stoltzfus with Eve MacMaster
Ruth felt a call to support women on the front lines of family relationships and home life. She improvised a career as a churchwoman, eventually becoming the first woman to be ordained by the Virginia Conference of the Mennonite Church. Through her nationally syndicated radio program, frequent church appearances, and pastoral work, Ruth Brunk Stoltzfus spent her life in ministry to God and the church.
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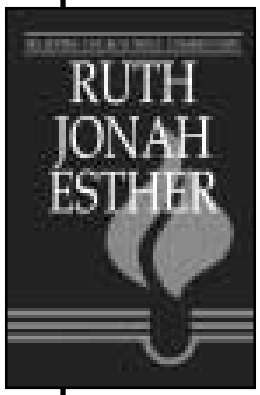

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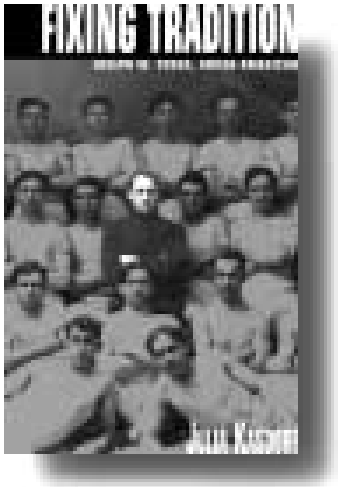

Fixing Tradition:
Joseph W. Yoder, Amish American,
by Julia Kasdorf, tells and interprets the story of Joseph W. Yoder (1872-1956), author of *Rosanna of the Amish* and a musician. His journey—from an isolated, Pennsylvania religious subculture to the world and back—is a heroic quest, fraught with conflicts, misunderstandings, and reversals of intention. Includes photos, notes, bibliography, index, map, timeline.
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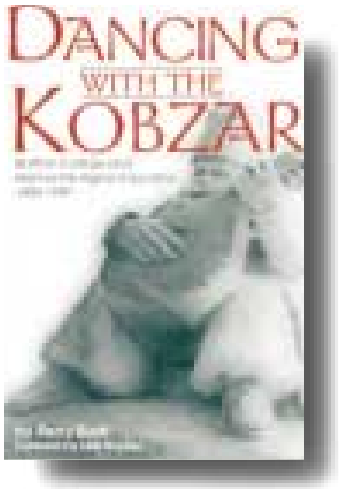

Dancing with the Kobzar:
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by Perry Bush. "Don't know what a Kobzar is?" asks Nelson Kraybill "You'll dance with one by the time you finish this colorful narrative. Wit, candor, and scholarly insight converge in this inspiring story of Mennonites engaging the world with the best of their own tradition."
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Angel in the Blue Room

Identical tombstones outside Croghan
Mennonite Church line up
as if for role call, conservatively
dressed even in death. But my cousin's
is easily found in the back row engraved
A child shall lead them, and Eric did
travel before us in the months preceding
his death, small and weak enough
to be pushed ahead in a stroller while
my brother, the same age, a lucky
seven, played catch and croquet
in the front yard. Thirty people miraculously
squeezed through the narrow
chamber that Saturday afternoon
we surrounded the bed in the family
farm's blue room. Eric's mom whispered *Do you*
see the angels? just hours after we had
sent off another cousin and his new
wife to their honeymoon cottage. Just
before the rest of us went to see
James Bond charm women, bullets,
and all of those high-tech gadgets to
save the world once more. My parents didn't
care that I was off to watch skin and
violence that matinée. They knew better
than to argue with a place in the dark
where the ingredients of that day could slip
from my bones for a makeshift moment, knew
that soon enough I'd return to blistering
sunlight, each ray's hot needle threading through
the pores of my scorched adolescence.

—Debra Gingerich has a Master of Fine Arts in Writing from Vermont College. She lives with her husband and pet cockatiel in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.