



Roots and Branches

Periodical of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC

*"What we have heard and known
we will tell the next generation."*
Psalm 78

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*Memorial to the Victims of Holodomor in
Ukraine. Photo: Louise Bergen Price*

Editorial - by Louise Bergen Price

The Russian Mennonite experience in the Soviet Union is often framed in the context of a unique suffering: Mennonites as innocent victims of a ruthless regime. Certainly in many instances they were particularly targeted, both as people of German ancestry and as a group that clung to a religious faith in an atheistic world.

But large scale suffering in Ukraine was not unique to Mennonites. This year marks the 80th anniversary of two cataclysmic events that took the lives of millions. Nineteen thirty-three was the last year of large-scale deportations to slave labour camps in the northern USSR. It was also the final year of the Holodomor, the artificial famine that spread untold misery and claimed up to 7 million lives in Ukraine. As we remember the shared suffering of our peoples, it is time, as Marlene Epp reminds us, to “shake off that burdensome parochialism that shapes so much of Mennonite thinking and replace it with a greater sense that ‘our’ history is

but a small part of ‘world’ history.”

Elsewhere in this issue – a rich variety of articles ranging from the celebration of Camp Squeah’s 50 years to the story of a Mandtler clock. David Leung speaks about the financial crisis and what it means for the Mennonite church and for individuals; and Harry Loewen takes a deeper look into the lives of CF and Mary Klassen, and the couple’s connection with Mary’s first husband, Jakob Reimer.

As always, we enjoy feedback from readers and welcome letters and emails. We are also interested in stories related to the Mennonite experience, whether in the form of written articles, drawings, photographs, old letters, journal entries, essays or poems. Address any submissions to The Editor at MHSBC (address on inside back cover).

Epp, Marlene. “Purple Clematis and Yellow Pine: On Cemeteries, Irony and Difference.”
www.goshen.edu/mqr/pastissues/jan00epp.html

2013 Annual Fundraising Banquet - by Robert Martens

“Is it possible to be a part-time pacifist?” This was one of many questions asked by John B. Toews in his superb lecture at the 2013 Fundraising Banquet of MHSBC. The dinner and lecture took place on September 21 at Emmanuel Mennonite Church. Ruth Derksen Siemens started the evening with a brief introduction of her new book *Daughters in the City*, which tells in word and picture the story of the two Girls’ Homes (*Mädchenheim*) in Vancouver, and of the young Mennonite immigrant girls who found community support there while they worked as maids in a strange English-speaking city.

After an excellent dinner, attendees heard John B. Toews talk on “Mennonite Pacifists in Ukraine amidst Anarchy (1917-1920).” It was clear that Toews’ expertise in this area is both scholarly

and passionate. Over the decades, he said, the Mennonite ideal of pacifism had frequently become a matter of doctrine and ritual. When Makhno and his anarchists brutally attacked Mennonite settlements after the Bolshevik Revolution, Mennonites were unprepared. A great debate followed over whether to fight back. During the brief occupation of Ukraine by the German army, many young Mennonites were seduced into taking up arms, and some trained under the German military. After all, Toews said, a uniform and gun carried a lot more swagger for a young Mennonite male than milking cows did.

The events in the Mennonite colonies turned catastrophic, for pacifist and defender alike: the great suffering incurred when local Russians took revenge on their prosperous Mennonite neighbours crossed all ideological and theological lines. Tonight, John B. Toews concluded, he could not give his listeners any happy endings. Many questions, few answers.

Request for Family Information

by Wilf Penner

I'm on a quest to find living relatives of one of my ancestors: one Jacob Janzen, b. Jan 4, 1825, d. Jan. 9, 1911, Rosthern, Saskatchewan. He was my paternal grandmother's father. I was born 4 years after Grandmother died, and my father was her youngest son. Her given name was Susanna, and she married an Abram Loewen in Chortiza colony, who died about four years after their wedding, leaving her with one surviving child, Maria. She married my grandfather Peter David

Penner in 1889 and they resided in Reinland, Yazykovo Colony. In 1892 they moved to Manitoba; the following year the Jacob Janzen family also arrived at Gretna, Manitoba, and in summer 1894 the whole clan moved to Rosthern and took up homesteads in the Eigenheim district. My grandparent's homestead was located just north of the Eigenheim Mennonite Church.

Since I have discovered this family connection through fairly recent research, I have never met any of my father's Janzen cousins, etc. I corresponded briefly with a Peter Janzen in 1991, and in a friendly letter he sent me information about my Janzen connections and numerous sheets of Janzen family descendants. By the time I returned to Saskatchewan for a visit in 2005, he had died, so I have yet to meet a living Janzen relative.

If anyone can help me make connections, please send me an email at wepenner@telus.net.

Upcoming Events

Agony and Ecstasy: On writing a History of MCC in Canada

Saturday, February 1st, 2014 at 7pm

Speaker: Esther Epp-Tiessen. Emmanuel Mennonite Church, Abbotsford, B.C. For more information please contact the MHSBC office: (604) 853-6177

Photograph Exhibition: *Clash: Conflict and Its Consequence*

January 23- March 30, 2014

The Reach, Abbotsford, B.C. Public Reception: Thursday January 30, 2014 at 7pm. Presentation by Esther Epp-Tiessen: *Steps toward Healing and Hope*.

This exhibition addresses the subject of war and conflict in photography. Moving beyond depictions of the spectacle of battle, the exhibition shows both the photographers' and the victims' experiences. Central to this exhibition are photography's relationship with trauma and remembrance, at the personal, communal, and national levels, and issues of what constitutes history, for whom, and why. Organized and circulated by the National Gallery of Canada.

Fall 2014 MHSBC fundraising banquet

Speaker: Marlene Epp, from Waterloo, Ontario

Topic: Mennonites and Food

MHSBC Book Launch of *It Happened in Moscow*

by Robert Martens

On July 9, 2013, Maureen and Herb Klassen introduced the new book, *It Happened in Moscow: a memoir of discovery*, at Bakerview MB Church. Maureen told a powerful story of three women, family secrets, an unknown sister, and a revisionist look at the life of CF Klassen during his years in Moscow. The book that emerged from this, she told a quietly attentive audience, is very much like a detective novel. A remarkable series of events – and coincidences – resulted in some startling revelations for the CF Klassen family and descendants. Yet, Klassen insisted, the story is redemptive: "God overrules our secrets."

The evening was augmented by a performance of a poignant Russian song much loved by CF Klassen's wife, Mary Brieger Reimer, who had lived through so much hardship but spoken so little about it.

Holodomor:

A Long-forgotten Famine

by Louise Bergen Price

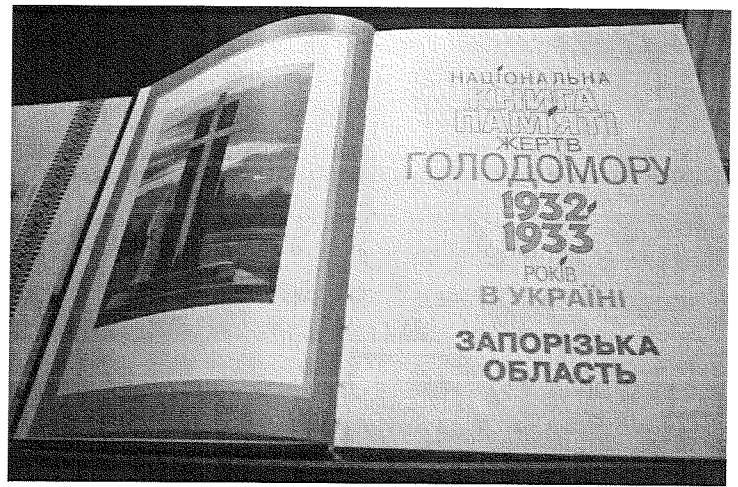
Sculptures of grieving angels guard the pathway that leads to Kiev's newest museum, the Memorial to the Victims of Holodomor, opened in 2009 (*Holod*: hunger; *moryty*: to kill by deprivation). Above the museum rises a tower in the shape of a burning candle. The museum itself is underground, built into the bank of the Dnieper. It commemorates the death, by famine, of up to seven million Ukrainians between 1931 and 1933.

The astonishing fact is that until recently, history textbooks, including those by most Mennonite authors, paid scant attention to the reason so many died, assuming the famine to be caused by drought or government mismanagement.

But the news of the famine, along with the reasons for it, had been broadcast to the world even before its peak. In 1931, Welsh journalist Gareth Jones, along with American entrepreneur J. Heinz II, travelled the Soviet Union by foot and by rail, often sleeping on the floors of peasants' cottages. Jones, fluent in Russian, French and German, learned firsthand the effects of the Five-Year Plan: how prosperous farmers (*kulaks*, meaning tight-fisted ones) and religious leaders were banished to die in Siberia while those who remained were forced onto collective farms (*kolkhoz*).

A lament heard at one peasant's cottage told of a new reality: "Oh, it is terrible! We used to have three cows, two horses, sheep, and ten chickens: now look around. The *dvor* [farmyard] is empty, and we only have two chickens. Now we only get half a litre of milk a day. ...That is why my children look so pale and ill. How can it get better when we have no land and no cows?"

Jones' and Heinz' travels took them to the Dneprostroy power station and dam, Stalin's mega-project in the heart of the Old Colony. While in



Martyrology Book, Zaporizhia, Ukraine. Photo: Louise Bergen Price

the area, Jones visited a "German" *kolkhoz*. He was told the entire village had been left with only 1,000 pounds of grain. Everyone lived in fear of expulsion or starvation:

They sent the Kulaks away from here and it was terrible. We heard in a letter that ninety children died on the way – ninety children from this district. ...

They force us to work on Sundays, although we are Mennonites and don't want to. They won't allow us to have Sunday Schools, or religious magazines. The Russians have lost their religion, but we Germans still stick to ours. A lot of people have gone to America – take us with you!

On their return to the United States, Jones and Heinz published *Experiences in Russia 1931*, likely the first source to link the words starvation and collectivization.¹

Two years later, Jones returned to the Soviet Union. Journalists were not allowed into famine areas, so Jones bought a train ticket and headed to Ukraine as a private visitor. What he saw and heard horrified him. On March 29, 1933, he wrote an article for the *New York Evening Post* which included these famous lines:

I walked along through villages and twelve collective farms. Everywhere was the cry, 'There is no bread. We are dying'. ... I tramped through the black earth region because that was once the richest farmland in Russia and because the correspondents have

been forbidden to go there to see for themselves what is happening.

In the train a Communist denied to me that there was a famine. I flung a crust of bread which I had been eating from my own supply into a spittoon. A peasant fellow-passenger fished it out and ravenously ate it. I threw an orange peel into the spittoon and the peasant again grabbed it and devoured it.

I stayed overnight in a village where there used to be two hundred oxen and where there now are six. The peasants were eating the cattle fodder and had only a month's supply left. They told me that many had already died

of hunger.

Two soldiers came to arrest a thief. They warned me against travel by night, as there were too many 'starving' desperate men.

'We are waiting for death' was my welcome, 'but see, we still have our cattle fodder. Go farther south. There they have nothing. Many houses are empty of people already dead,' they cried.²

Jones' report brought an immediate rebuttal from the *New York Times*. Moscow correspondent Walter Duranty responded, "There is no actual starvation or deaths from starvation, but there is widespread mortality from diseases due to malnutri-

tion."³ Duranty's statement was greeted with relief by those still enthralled by the visions of a Soviet utopia. Other western reporters stationed in Moscow, anxious not to offend the Soviet government, affirmed Duranty's words. Foreign dignitaries who toured the Soviet Union were routed through villages stocked with actors dressed as peasants, tables laden with food, and healthy livestock trucked from one village to another. President Roosevelt, anxious to establish trade ties, recognized the Soviet government in November 1933. (Canada would not establish diplomatic relations until the USSR entered the war in 1941.)

While the people of Ukraine starved, Soviet ships filled with grain headed for European ports, providing money to fuel Stalin's dreams of industrializing the nation. It was illegal to use the word "hunger," so doctors simply assigned another cause of death. Cases of cannibalism occurred frequently enough that government posters declared it a crime.

Although hunger stalked Menonite villages as well as Ukrainian ones, there were relatively few Menonite deaths. According to Gerhardt



The famous statue of a girl with ears of corn that stands in front of the Holodomor Memorial. Photo: Wikimedia commons

Fast, only 58 Mennonites died of starvation in Chortiza colony, and this number includes victims of the 1921 famine.⁴

My mother, Irene Sawatzky Bergen, was ten years old in Nieder Chortiza when the famine began. Because her father got a job in the *Kommunar* factory across the river, her family received bread ration cards. They hungered, but survived. Across the street lived an Old Believer family, the Golubkovs. When all farm animals were forcibly taken to the collective farm, Mrs. Golubkov retrieved her cow. For this, she was sent to a Siberian work camp. Her husband, Makar, was left with their two young sons. "Oma would give him food," my mother told me, "but we had so little ourselves. Makar Golubkov starved to death. His relatives came to take the boys."

Mennonites had two major advantages over their Ukrainian and Russian neighbours. First, some still had goods such as wedding rings that could be sold at the TORGSIN (trade with foreigners) shops, where one could buy food and other goods not available elsewhere. Perhaps more importantly – most had links to relatives in Germany or North

America who, in spite of the Depression, sent small money orders. Three dollars could buy a sack of millet at the TORGSIN, and was often the difference between death and life.

Those who lived through the famine were blunt as to its cause. In *Einer von Vielen* Olga Rempel writes, "In 1933 everything was again in short supply although we'd had a good harvest. It was called the year of the artificial famine, since the harvest was used for other purposes."⁵

Henry H. Winter,⁶ minister in Chortiza, states, "The harvest was average, so no one should have starved, but the return of the harvest was taken away. Commissions sent by the government went from door to door and searched for hidden provisions." Hoarding any amount of grain, or even gleaning left-over ears was considered "violating the sanctity of socialist property" and could mean the death penalty.

In 1934, with intellectuals and leaders exiled to Siberia and peasants starved into submission, there was no one left to oppose collectivization, let alone agitate for an independent Ukraine. Stalin had achieved his goal and grain quotas eased. Now

that the worst of the famine was over, journalists conceded that it had, indeed, occurred. Duranty, speaking to friends about collectivization, joked that in order to make an omelet, one had to break eggs. When asked how many had died, he confided that it was likely about 10 million, but they were "only Russians."⁷

Within the



Memorial to honour Mennonite Victims of Tribulation, Stalinist Terror and Religious Oppression, Zaporizhia.

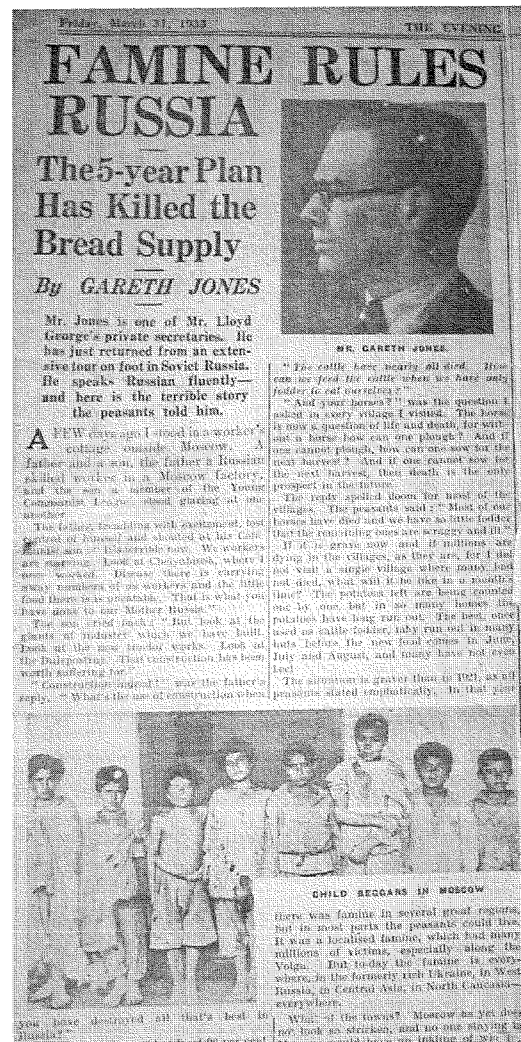
Photo: Louise Bergen Price

Soviet Union, any discussion of the famine was forbidden by law. It was not until the fall of the Soviet Union that the famine was acknowledged. On November 28, 2006, the Ukrainian Rada passed a law defining the famine as deliberate genocide. Canada followed in 2008, instituting "Ukrainian Famine and Genocide (Holodomor) Memorial Day" on the fourth Saturday of November to commemorate "a deliberately induced Ukrainian famine, organized and master-minded by the Soviet regime under Joseph Stalin" in an attempt to "destroy aspirations of an independent Ukraine."⁸

A saying attributed to Stalin goes, "when one man dies it is a tragedy; when thousands die it's statistics."⁹ And when millions die? It is to these millions that the Holodomor museum pays tribute, yet even surrounded by photos and artifacts I find it impossible to comprehend the scope of the catastrophe. What grips my heart are pictures that tell individual stories. A dozen hands, all reaching for one piece of bread. A girl and her brother, alone in the stubble of a wheat field. A *kulak* family, their home in flames, fleeing. The pictures tell the same stories passed on to me by my parents. I am moved, too, by the martyrology books, one from each *oblast* (district), thick volumes with name after name of famine victims. In the Zaporizhia book, I search for Makar Golubkov. His name is not there – the list is not yet complete.

Why remember such horror? Stuart Murray, president of the Canadian Museum of Human Rights in Winnipeg puts it this way: "Genocide, like the Holodomor, is not only a crime against its victims, but against all of humanity, perpetuated by denial and minimization. It is essential that we learn to stay vigilant in defence of human rights – and understand what can happen when we look the other way."

- 1 "Gareth Jones, Journalist." http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gareth_Jones_journalist
- 2 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gareth_Jones_journalist
- 3 In 1934 Gareth Jones was murdered by Chinese bandits. It is suspected that his death was engineered by the Soviets.
- 4 http://www.garethjones.org/soviet_articles/russians_hungry_not_starving.htm
- 5 Gerhardt Fast, *Das Ende von Chortitza*. Winnipeg: Regehr's Printing, 1973. p. 32.
- 6 Olga Rempel, *Einer von Vielen; die Lebensgeschichte von Aaron P. Toews*. Winnipeg: CMBC, 1979. p. 85.
- 7 Heinrich H. Winter, *Ein Hirte der Bedrängten; Heinrich Winter, der letzte Älteste von Chortitza*. Wheatley, ON, 1988. p. 14.
- 8 Dr. James Mace, "Collaboration in the suppression of the Ukrainian famine" <http://www.ukrweekly.com/old/archive/1988/028822.shtml>
- 9 http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Joseph_Stalin



Excerpts from *Khrushchev Remembers*

Translated and edited by Strobe Talbott. Introduction and notes by Edward Crankshaw. New York: Little Brown and Co., 1970.

by Robert Martens

In 1956, three years after Stalin's death, Nikita Khrushchev managed to climb to the pinnacle of the Soviet hierarchy. His term in power, however, was too unreliable for some Communist Party members, and in 1964 he was deposed and pensioned off to an urban apartment and a dacha in the countryside. This amounted to house arrest, but at least he escaped the fate of so many before him. He died of heart problems in 1971. A year earlier, however, his memoirs were smuggled to the West. Strobe Talbott's translation was published with an introduction and notes by Edward Crankshaw. This book is available at the MHS Archives Library

In his notes on the Ukraine famine of the 1930s, Edward Crankshaw, the expert on Soviet studies, points out that terror had been used as a state tool ever since the first days of the Bolshevik regime.

The famine in Ukraine followed on the heels of the enforced collectivization of farms, which was, as Crankshaw remarks, "an atrocity on a colossal scale, the consequences of which [were] permanently damaging to the Soviet economy" (67). In other words, the famine was in fact a terror perpetrated on the Ukrainian nation by Stalin's totalitarian regime.

Nikita Khrushchev, who survived the Soviet purges to become premier of the USSR, writes in his memoir that he was appalled by the hunger he found in Ukraine. Did he know more than he admits? Certainly the reader must "read between the lines." Khrushchev was himself complicit in the murder of multitudes, and later accused his former leader Stalin only of "excesses." Neverthe-

less, his memoir provides fascinating glimpses into the paranoid and utterly vicious politics of the Soviet empire.

Another Ukrainian famine occurred in 1946-47. During the German army's occupation of Ukraine after its invasion of the USSR in 1941, collectivization of agricultural land had broken down, much to the delight of many Ukrainian farmers. Now Khrushchev was sent to Ukraine – where he had been born – to reimpose collectivization by any means necessary. Brutality was the norm in this process, and famine struck once again. This time, however, Khrushchev's views had changed, and he no longer trusted Stalin. He took orders from the top as he was forced to – if he was to stay alive – but defended his people from the Moscow authorities as best he could.

The following excerpts relate to the Ukraine famine of the 1930s:

They literally begged us to give them food.

Collectivization was begun the year before I was transferred from the Ukraine, but it wasn't until after I started work in Moscow that I began to suspect its real effects on the rural population – and it wasn't until many years later that I realized the scale of the starvation and repression which accompanied collectivization as it

was carried out under Stalin. ...

We spent only a few days at the collective farm [in Ukraine] and were appalled at the conditions we found there. We called a meeting to present the money we'd brought them. ... When we told them that the money was allocated for farm equipment, they told us they weren't interested in

equipment – what they wanted was bread. They literally begged us to give them food. Sdobnov and I were put up in the hut of an old widow who was so poor that she had nothing to give us; we shared with her the food we'd brought along for the trip.

I'd had no idea that things were this bad. At the Industrial Academy we'd been living under the illusion promoted by *Pravda* [the official state newspaper] that collectivization was proceeding smoothly and everything was fine in the countryside.

Then, without warning, Stalin delivered his famous "Dizzy with Success"* speech, laying the blame for the excesses of the collectivization on active local Party members. The same people who had been conducting the collectivization with such reckless, bestial fervour suddenly found themselves under *Pravda's* lash. At the time we considered Stalin's speech a masterpiece, a bold blow struck by the Party leadership against the men responsible for the excesses. But I remember being bothered by the thought: if everything has been going on as well on the collective farms as Stalin has been telling us until now, then what's the reason for the "Dizzy with Success" speech all of a sudden? ...

When the failure of the collectivization became widely known, we were all taught to blame scheming kulaks, rightists, Trotskyists, and Zinovievites [Grigory Zinoviev had struggled with Stalin for power] for what was happening. There was always the handy explanation of counterrevolutionary sabotage.

But now [1970] that Stalin's abuses of power have been exposed, a more searching, objective analysis of collectivization is in order if we're ever going to understand what really happened. Perhaps we'll never know how many people perished directly as a result of collectivization, or indirectly as a result of Stalin's eagerness to blame its failure on others. But two things are certain: first, the Stalin brand of collectivization brought us nothing but misery and brutality; and second, Stalin played the decisive role in the leadership of our country at the time. ... Therefore, if we were looking for someone to hold responsible, we could lay the blame squarely on Stalin's own shoulders.

But all this is hindsight. At the time, we didn't know the truth. We still believed in Stalin and trusted him (pp. 67-69, 71).

*The speech was delivered on March 2, 1930. Stalin insisted that his perfectly straightforward instructions had been misunderstood. This was the master denouncing his own instruments for carrying out his orders (note by Edward Crankshaw, 68).

Mystery Photo



The individuals pictured here need identification. If you can help, email genealogy@mhsbc.com.

A Life in the Gulag

Johann Enns. *Simply Trust Every Day: The Experiences of Johann Enns in a Forced Labour Camp in the USSR*. Translated by Jacob A. Loewen.

by Robert Martens

Again the Spirit of God began to work in me. However, Satan was still stronger. I often remembered things from my youth. How gladly I would have once more liked to see my father. My brothers and my sisters had all been murdered. I myself had lost half my life. All of these things awakened deep anger and hatred for the NKVD [Soviet secret police] in me. ... I finally vowed that I would revenge myself against them, even if it took my last drop of blood. But the Lord be praised, my parents had taught me otherwise. God says, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay.' Thus the Spirit of God continued to work in me (Enns 20).

By the time Johann Enns, at the age of 75, wrote his brief memoir at his son's request, he had spent decades in the brutal labour camps of the Soviet Union. His telling is not a family history, and in fact his marriage and family are mentioned only in passing. *Simply Trust Every Day* is an indictment of the Soviet holocaust in which countless millions died, either murdered, intentionally starved, or sent to a lingering death in the work camps. Enns' simple uneducated language relates that story more vividly than many more sophisticated accounts.

Specific details are often lacking in this book, but it seems that Johann Enns was born around 1912 in the village of Gnadenheim, Slavgorod Colony, Siberia. In the late 1920s the family attempted a last ditch attempt to leave Russia, but the borders closed. They were transported back to Siberia in cattle cars. When they reached home, however, the father was arrested – he died of his cruel treatment some time later – and the rest of the family was de-

ported with many others to the far northern wastes of the Soviet Union. Many died here of cold and starvation. Enns personally lost several members of his family (see excerpt below), but he himself, comparatively strong and healthy, somehow survived. He was an extraordinary individual, relentless in his commitment not to succumb.

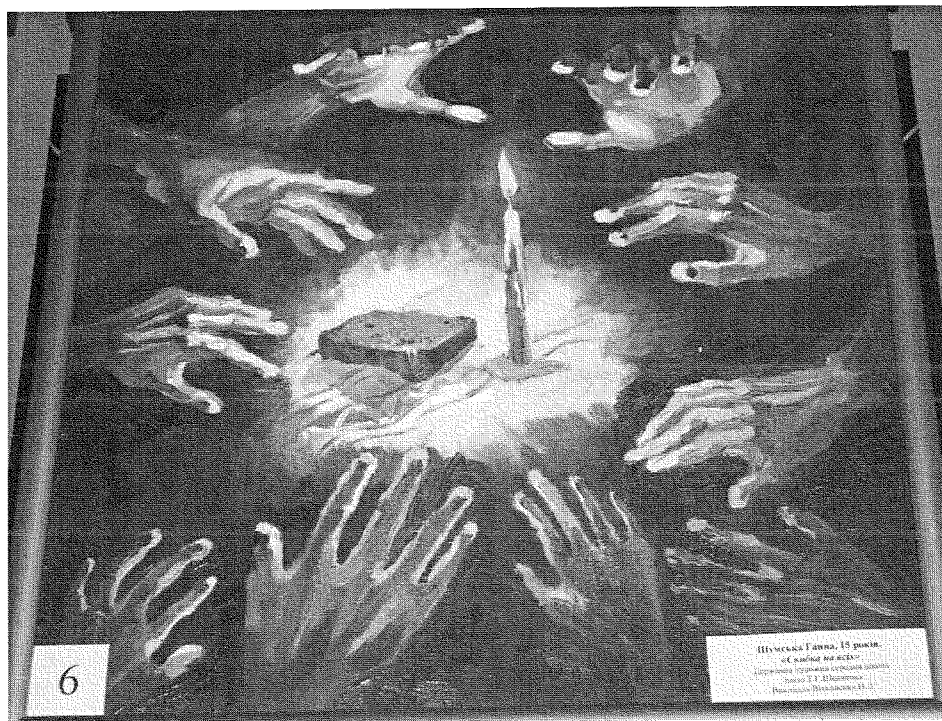
In 1937, still inside the camps, Enns married and managed to father a large family over the years. And yet, he claims, he had never experienced the inner transformation of the spirit: "I remembered a picture of Satan sitting beside a naked person and beating him with his fists. When I left home, I had firmly decided I would end my life there in the forest. I stood before a decision, life or death!" (27) World War II began for the USSR in 1941, and work camp inmates were assigned the most brutal tasks in support of the war effort. Enns writes, "As much as I can remember, in the fall of 1944 we had to cut green grass and dump it into a hole. It was supposed to be for cattle feed [silage]; however, by spring, the people were so short of food that they stole it, cooked it and ate it. The hunger and this inedible stuff that they ate began to influence their mental capacities" (21). Through all this, Johann Enns somehow persevered, but it was only in 1951 that he experienced a personal yielding to God's grace: "I came home really happy, even the stars in the heaven seemed to rejoice with me. I saw myself in an entirely new world. I also saw I had a different family – the indescribable joy was so great that I could just as well have run through the forest and shouted to all people, 'Be converted to the living God and receive this joy which overcomes the fear of death'" (30).

From that point on, Johann Enns became an

indomitable force for the gospel as he understood it, preaching scripture and defying the authorities openly. He writes of one situation: "The opponent was alone with me. He at once began to threaten me, because he was violently angry. He smashed his fist on the table and said, 'If you won't stop this, you will rot in jail and your wife and children will die.' ... 'Oh dear man [Enns replied], why should I be afraid of you? You were very wrong. I have an almighty God! You can do nothing to me if He does not permit it.' His threats continued" (31). In 1955 Enns was released to a collective farm. Soon, however, he moved with his family by airplane to the former Halbstadt where his son was now studying. But Enns simply could not keep his mouth shut, and he was rearrested in 1966.

Conditions in the labour camps, now that Stalin had died, were much better. There was nominal work pay, an eight hour day, and even lawyers advocating for prisoners. In fact a general amnesty was eventually proclaimed, but Enns could not take advantage by playing the hypocrite. He writes, "One of the soldiers led me to where some of the supervisors were sitting. Immediately one of them asked me, 'Is there still a God?' I thought, 'What shall I say to these foolish men?' I responded, 'Has God gone away?' Then one of the supervisors responded, 'Clearly he has'" (53). Enns was led back to the camp.

In 1969 Johann Enns was finally freed. His last remembered threat from the authorities occurred in 1987. It had been a long, inconceivably hard life, and yet at the end he did not consider a moment wasted: "One heard so many things that other prisoners said. [One said,] 'These years which I am spending here in prison shall not be counted as part of my life.' Then I said, 'By me, they shall be counted just like any other days. First of all it was a good school for me, and it served to fortify my life as a believer'" (59).



Photograph of a painting from the Holodomor Memorial, Kiev.

Photo: Louise Bergen Price

All excerpts are from *Simply Trust Every Day*. A copy can be found at the MHS Archives library. The following lengthy section chronicles the details of the first arrest of the Enns family.

It is almost too difficult to call into remembrance what a person can suffer and then to write it down. It is hard to believe how people let themselves to be used to torture other people for no reason whatsoever. So the twelve of us, without our father, were sent into forced labour. Toward the end of the village called Halbstadt, there stood a large brick warehouse. In this building all the *kulaks* were gathered together. All the *kulaks*, all these dangerous people, were gathered together there. None of them were permitted to go back to their villages. When they finally had a large enough group, we were moved out. We were brought to the closest railroad station, Slavgorod. The road took us through villages in which some of our relatives lived. These people wanted to send some milk along with us, but the officers guarding our transport did not allow any of them to come close to us. Our relatives set the container down and wanted us to come and get it, but we were not allowed to do so. One of the guards went and smashed the glass container with his

boots. Finally we arrived at the railroad station. I do not know into what kind of train we were put. I only know we were in a train for a long time, always in cattle cars.

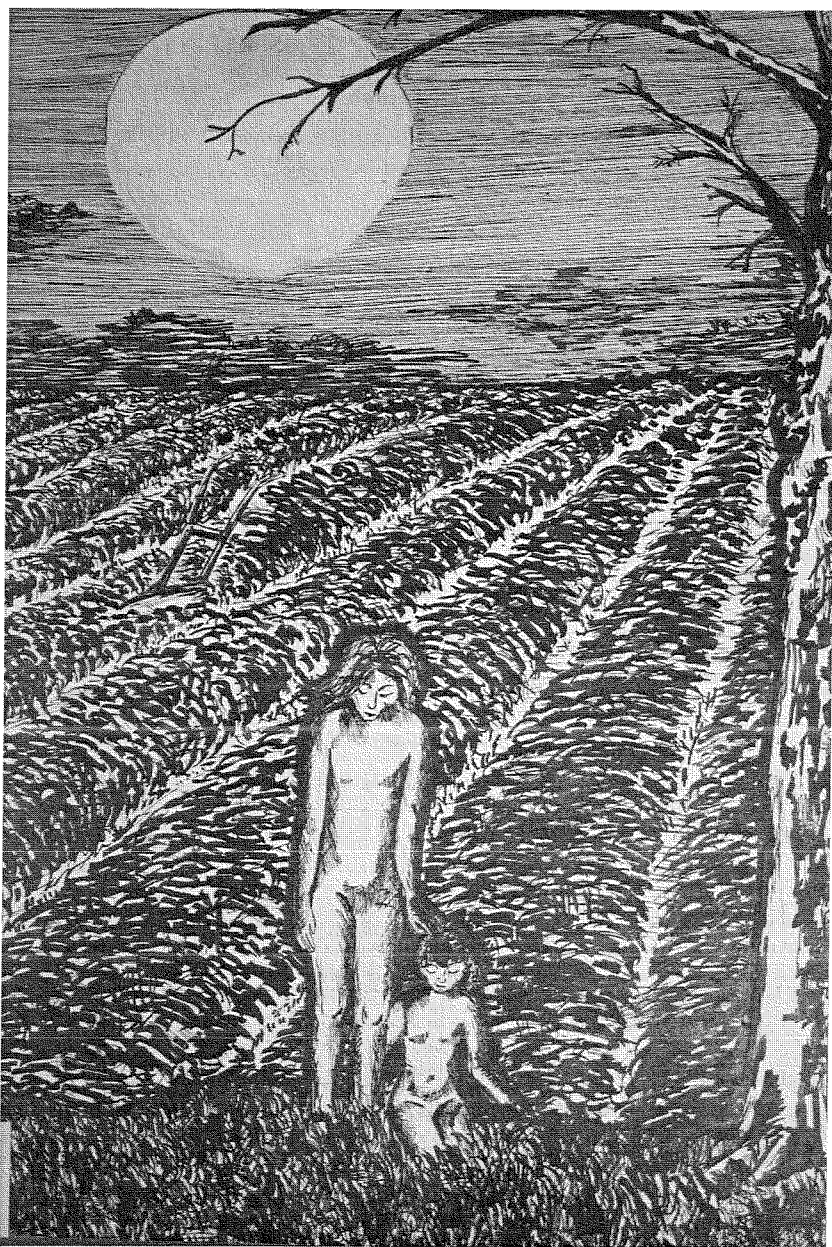
We were then brought to a large cattle barge. This barge was full of people and it did not take long before every kind of sickness broke out among them. We got nothing warm to eat, all we had was what we had brought along from home, and that was soon exhausted. We began to suffer starvation. There were three such cattle barges full of people, one tied right behind the other, and the three of them were being dragged by a tug up the Ob River.

Each one of these barges had a little kitchen stove in the middle. The people made dough and heated that dough. When the dough was heated it was divided so that the people would not die of hunger. The trip by cattle barge took exactly one month. We left on the 17th May and arrived at our destination on the 17th of June. We arrived there at precisely the time when the insects in the northern virgin forests are at their worst.

We came to a place there of which the Russian proverb says, "Where Makar [a Russian herd boy], has never yet herded calves." Nobody had ever lived there, it was virgin forest. That is where our brothers' and sisters' graves are. They had to die a martyr's death, something they did not deserve. When the barges were brought to shore, we were told to get up on the bank. The bank was high and steep. Beyond it there was dense forest and the place was buzzing with insects. The atmosphere was filled with them. There was endless moaning, groaning and children crying. At first, death took all the small children. They were wrapped in birch bark and buried. There was no rest day or night.

We were living out in the open with no shelter. There was only cornmeal to eat and there was very little of that. There were no vegetables and no one was accustomed to the climate there. However, we were forced to do hard labour. If someone was not able to work, his food was cut off. To all these deprivations and suffering another thing was added, they didn't give us the most important element we needed, that is, salt. They wanted to reduce us to absolute powerlessness.

At the beginning we still had some religious services, but that was soon discontinued. For the person who has never been in such a situation and who has never experienced famine, it will be hard to imagine what's happening. Bit by bit the people were tortured to death. First the



Photograph of a painting from the Holodomor Memorial, Kiev.
Photo: Louise Bergen Price

person loses the fear of God, but finally he has no fear of death either. There is only one thought that motivates the human mind then, how can I get enough food to survive? One day I was walking along the edge of the river to see whether I could find some edible weeds or some greenery that we could add to our food, but it was for nothing. The place was bare, there was nothing edible there.

In the summer our main work was the clearing away of the virgin forest and burning all the waste wood material. With enormous effort and a lot of hard work, eventually we were able to clear small fields from which we had to remove all the roots and stumps. These fields were then dug up. Sometimes we had horses with which to turn the soil and we planted rye. When the fall was approaching and the rye was just green, the people just ate the green stalks of the rye raw in the fields.

With a lot of effort and many difficulties we were able to build a small house as shelter for the winter. It was a very simple shelter. It was only one room in the middle of which stood a Russian oven [for heating] and in the corner there was a stove for cooking. On the one side of the wall there were the bunks for sleeping. As far as I remember, the bunks were made of small round branches. On the other side of the house there were smaller bunks for the mothers and the little children.

Soon the bitter winter was upon us. There was plenty of wood there to heat the place, but the problem was that it had to be cut, dried and prepared for burning, and this preparation of the firewood was not part of the government work plan. The evergreen forest was about a kilometre away from where the shelter had been built and we had to make little sleds with which to haul the evergreen log pieces. When these log pieces arrived at the shelter they were split into shakes and walls were covered with these shakes. The whole thing was then plastered with mud to seal any cracks.

Everywhere people were dying, one after the other. Also in our own house death struck. The first to die was the oldest sister, Anna, then it was Martin. As far as I remember he was the second to die. Maria was very weak, but she was still on her feet at

this time. Because it was impossible to dig so many individual graves, a common grave was dug. Even Maria had to help in this process and not long after, she herself died and was put into this very same grave. So that in a sense she dug her own grave.

The illnesses were also increasing. There was an outbreak of scurvy. The people were all swollen and many were totally bed-bound. The teeth in their mouths began to fall out. Their legs were stiff and swollen and their bones began to curve. I myself lay in my sick bunk, waiting for death, but the almighty, all-knowing God had other plans for me. I had no hope nor inkling that God could make a just person out of me. Abram, the oldest brother, was very weak. At that time we received a package from our sister Margaret in South America with all kinds of products. We also added many things to the dough which we made – sawdust, rotten wood, etc., everyone wanted to increase the size of the portion of the food he got. Even horses that had died were eaten up to the last intestine. This probably was harmful.

It is difficult to describe how miserable a person can become when he is hungry. Thus the little help which our sister from America sent us was already too late for the oldest brother Abram. He left us and passed away. Even though I was almost without feelings or thoughts at the time, it suddenly dawned on me that the support of the family had been taken away, the care of the family had now become my lot. But I myself was so helpless.

Finally spring came. One day when the river was already free from ice, everything had melted and floated down river, a ship arrived. It brought flour, a few potatoes. My brother Jacob, who was still on his feet, had to go to the river to help unload.

It was a beautiful spring day. As much as I was able, I dragged myself outside and lay in the warm sun outside the door. My brother Jacob came from work and gave me a raw potato. It was about the size of a chicken egg. It is fifty-seven years ago already, but the good taste of that raw potato is still fresh in my mind. (pages 8-13)

Stateless by Anna Kosloff, as told to Anna Bilbrough

by Robert Martens

Not to be remembered is not to have lived.
To live in the memory of others is to have
everlasting life. (A Chinese woman, quoted
by Anna Kosloff, 135)

Mennonites and Anabaptists have a long history as a wandering people. Uprooting and homelessness are part of their collective memory, and linger on in their stories, their songs and modes of worship, and very likely in their perceptions of the contemporary world. Numerous Mennonite memoirs have been written expressing the tragic loss of displacement as well as gratitude for the grace of new beginnings. Anna Kosloff's *Stateless*, however, is unusual for its power and passion, its embrace of life, its tranquil acceptance of tragedy, but most of all for its emotional arc. Anna's journey is one that takes her away from the exclusiveness of ethnicity; she immigrates into a new understanding of human nature.

She was born the second oldest child of Abraham and Elizabeth Bergen in 1900 in the district of Samara. Anna's childhood was a happy one, and she always remembered with fondness the organized Mennonite community of her youth. Her decades of wandering began with the Russian Revolution of 1917, when the family moved to Orenburg to escape the ravages of banditry and oppression. But the brutal massacre of a family in Orenburg convinced them to move on once again, to remote Siberia, which they thought would be relatively safe. It would be a journey of 1600 miles. Anna wept upon leaving her home once again, but her father would not allow it: "Anna," he said, "we do not question the will of the Lord. We face His decisions bravely" (7). On the nine-week wagon train trek to Slavgorod, the Mennonite travellers would face hunger,

disease, and the ongoing chaos of violence, as rival Whites and Reds struggled for control. "The massacre we witnessed," said the father, "could have been committed by either side. Neither knows what they are doing. They are crazed with a desire to kill" (10).

In Slavgorod the Mennonites built emergency shelters of turf, and settled in to survive the winter and sow their crops in spring. Here Anna experienced the grief of her mother's death to typhoid fever, but also the joy of marriage to Andreas Nachtigal. Even in distant Siberia, however, the oppression of the new Soviet order reached them. Again and again the Communists requisitioned the crops and possessions of Mennonites and other villagers, until people were dying daily of hunger and cold. Because of the frozen ground, bodies could not be buried, and were stored in the empty granaries until the arrival of warmer weather. "Had the government handled the situation with some organization and forethought," Anna writes, "we could have contributed much food for the hungry people. But now the situation had become chaotic, and the landowners regarded the government with hostility and bitterness" (18).

Then conditions temporarily improved. The American Relief Association saved many from starvation, and Lenin's New Economic Plan allowed for more individual initiative. Order was re-established. "Ancestral feeling was still strong in many families so our men designed [our homes] more in the Dutch style than the Russian..."(20), writes Anna. The Nachtigals started a family. But under Stalin the terror resumed, and food was once more requisitioned to the last crumb. Because Andreas was a pastor, he was declared an enemy of the state, and the family's property was confiscated and sold at auction. At a kangaroo court, Andreas was sentenced to five years' hard labour; he was ordered to report at a

work camp every morning. His loss of temper during the proceedings only made matters worse: "Andreas, who had seemed calm until then, suddenly crumpled the piece of paper [the accusations] and, throwing it on the floor, he shouted at the judge, 'You have no right to hound me and my family in this manner.' Andreas' face was white and his whole body was shaking" (28). He was beaten and dragged away.

Over the next months the family barely survived, even with the aid of a kindly Mennonite administrator, Heinrich Voth, who risked his neck to find them a house. Anna volunteered to work beside her husband at the labour camp in order to acquire extra rations. A Soviet official summoned her and said, "I have asked you here to advise you to separate from this man; he will be of no use to you or your children in the future. He is a very bad influence on the community around him" (36).

Eventually Andreas was arrested, with the help of young Mennonite collaborators, as he preached at a service in a neighbouring village; for a long time after that, Anna's daughter would scream at the sight of a uniform. Andreas was imprisoned, but by means of a bribe, a great deal of courage, and the assistance of a Mennonite who had managed to have himself hired as a prison guard, Anna rescued her husband at night from his prison cell. Over the following days she hid him in their house. She reports, "I locked the door and went about my daily tasks as calmly as possible, always listening for footsteps or a knock on the door, ready with a lie on the tip of my tongue should anyone question me. I had become quite an accomplished liar over the past few months" (46).

At one point, among the Soviets searching their home was an embarrassed young Mennonite. The daily terror became unendurable, and deciding that any life elsewhere must be better than this one, the Nachtigal family escaped by train to Turkistan, hoping from there to cross over into China. Andreas' brother Abraham saw them off. She writes, "He left without looking back. I felt then that I would

never see him or any of the others again" (57).

While living in Turkistan, Anna worked as a nurse, a profession which required little training at that time due to shortages and war conditions. In the hospital she discovered patients who had been captured during their flight from the Soviet Union, and were being treated behind locked doors pending trial for their "crimes." "I fought back tears of pity for these poor people, fear for ourselves, and disgust for those who were causing all this suffering" (66). She learned that a young woman being held there was a daughter of a friend, and without any hesitation, Anna agreed to rescue her from the clutches of the Soviet police. One night, at the end of her shift, she stole a nurse's uniform to disguise the young woman, and the two walked out past a drunken guard. Would the ill young woman survive another attempt at flight? Anna writes that "[S]trength is not only of the body; more often it is of the spirit, inspired by what we aim to achieve... fighting for" (71).

Finally, after long days of secret preparations, arrangements were made to join a group of fifty to sixty families intending to cross over into China. Of all Anna's arduous treks, this would be the most punishing. The work was getting too dangerous, the guide said; this would be his last trip. In the dead of night, the refugees lined up in groups of three, and began their walk across the sand dunes. The nearest water was five or six days away. Because of the blistering desert heat, as well as to avoid pursuers, the refugees marched only at night. Anna lost sight of Andreas, who had turned very ill. She staggered back to find him. Somehow, by following tracks in the sand, they managed to rejoin the group. "You'll make it," the guide said to Andreas, "You're made of the right stuff. It's what's in the heart that counts" (82). And night after night the gruelling trek continued, as Andreas' health deteriorated. "How absurd it is," he said, "to think that man can draw a thin line across this earth, on one side of which you are free and on the other you are a cap-

**Strength is not of
the body; more
often it is of the
spirit, inspired by
what we aim to
achieve...**

tive at the mercy of your tormentors. It's like a game we played when we were children, only it becomes dangerous when played by grown-ups with twisted minds" (83).

The trek became nearly unbearable when Andreas collapsed and hemorrhaged. He pleaded with the family to go on without him, but Anna would not even consider it, and from that point on they travelled alone, as the main group moved on ahead. When the family ran out of water, Anna, against all odds, discovered a slimy spring in the sand dunes.

When Andreas could no longer walk, he was tied to a donkey and dragged along. Then, after eight nights of travel, the donkey sniffed water and switched to a fast trot. It was the Khorgoz River that marked the Russian-Chinese border. They had escaped the Soviet tyranny.

Their troubles, however, were far from over. Just a little way across the border, they were captured by refugee traders who made a living selling escapees back to the Soviets. The traders were led by a sadistic man of mixed Chinese and European blood, who spoke fluent Russian. Eventually they were freed, and managed to make it to the city of Kuldip. But here Andreas finally succumbed to bleeding ulcers and dysentery. Anna was left on her own to somehow support herself and her children. She found temporary employment as a housekeeper for a kindly, opium-smoking Chinese woman of wealth. Later she joined with ethnic Russians to launch a business making and selling but-tons of animal bone, and was then employed as a trainer at a knitting factory. One day Anna had a severe fright when she encountered the half-caste refugee trader on the city streets. A vigilante group that included Mennonites captured, tortured, and executed him.

Then malaria struck, and two of Anna's children died. It was time to move on again. Anna investigated the possibility of immigration to Canada, and did receive a letter from her brother George who lived in British Columbia, but the necessary

documents could only be obtained in faraway Kashgar. It meant another long and arduous trek. Anna would not be dissuaded, however, and made preparations to travel. She was fortunate to be issued a Nansen Passport, which guaranteed safe conduct for *bona fide* Russian refugees. Anna hired a guide and departed for Kashgar in August of 1932.

The journey lasted 38 days, and included a dangerous traverse of a mountain pass at 12,000 feet. It was during this time that Anna experienced what she regarded as a revelation, that faith should never

She found temporary employment as a housekeeper for a kindly, opium-smoking Chinese woman of wealth.

be confined to ethnicity or groupings of any kind. She would always cherish her Mennonite background and maintain her trust in a loving God, but her sufferings had changed her forever. She states, "I found that I had changed my attitude towards life. I could never again belong to one specific religion [that taught] mine was right and all others were wrong. We [Mennonites] had, like most other people, lived in our own communities, wrapped in self-

righteousness, tolerating others but never really accepting them. Thus we too had created the opportunity for evil – that of the exclusion of fellow human beings, which can lead to intolerance and persecution. Maybe we were all just a little to blame for allowing it to erupt on such a large scale" (138).

In Kashgar Anna encountered an expatriate Russian community, most of them wealthy aristocrats. She was introduced to a former officer, Ivan Kosloff, at a dinner and dance. She writes, "Quite suddenly and without warning I had been catapulted into a completely different world" (147). Anna felt awkward and embarrassed on the dance floor, but she was immediately attracted to Kosloff, and they were soon married by an Orthodox priest. She writes, "As far as our backgrounds were concerned, we were worlds apart, but we needed one another" (150). Then civil war threatened, and they were warned to leave the region as soon as possible: "We made it appear like a very ordinary occurrence to the children. It was just time to move on once more" (153).

Together with other Russian exiles, the Kosloffs set out to cross over the Hindu Kush pass into India. Each man carried vodka and a shovel, the latter for digging out trails along perilous mountain escarpments.

Without the help of local nomads such as the Kirghiz, the group might not have survived. At the crest of the pass at 16,000 feet, Anna revealed to an exasperated Ivan that she was pregnant. "There is nothing much the matter with me, Vanya," she said, "It's just that you are to be a father in approximately seven months" (162).

Despite the near death of their children, the

Kosloffs managed eventually to reach the city of Srinagar in India. "You know," Ivan said, "if we ever tried to tell anyone of our experiences they would not believe us, although we have proved that even the seemingly impossible is possible when one's life is at stake" (172).

India was meant to be temporary, but emigration remained difficult. While there, the Kosloffs had their children baptized as Anglicans, and then left their daughters in boarding school while they moved on to break ground in a new colony. Anna was deeply drawn to the local Buddhist people, but she never felt completely at ease: "We longed for a more temperate climate, among our own people in a place we could really call home" (193). Then the family received notice that Canada would accept

them as immigrants, but they would have to assemble in Berlin. En route they stopped in Antwerp. "I found the Flemish language, which is spoken there, very much like the Platt we spoke at home and real-

ized with some emotion that I was near the land my ancestors had migrated from to Russia many years ago" (201).

They arrived in Berlin in the fateful year of 1939. War was in the air, and all permits to emigrate were cancelled. The Kosloffs survived the war years in Germany, with Ivan working as a translator. When combat ended, they were nearly swept up by Russian troops who were forcing refugees back home and of-

ten directly into prison camps. They were saved by their Nansen Passports. In the end the Kosloffs received permission to immigrate to Australia; Canada had become difficult in immigration matters due to heavy demand. Tragically, Ivan died of lung cancer before the departure date, and Anna left Europe with her children on an American ship in 1949. She would be stateless no longer. She declared, "On 21 February [1950] I stood on the deck and watched as we approached the shores of yet another country, Australia, and perhaps FREEDOM!" (213)

Kosloff, Anna (as told to Anna Bilbrough). *Stateless*. Elwood, Australia: Esplanade Books, 1989.

Stateless is available at the MHS Archives library.



Photograph of a painting from the Holodomor Memorial, Kiev.
Photo: Louise Bergen Price

Our Genealogy Team at Mennonite Historical Society of BC

by Don Fehr

MHSBC has a very active genealogy research group that has assisted many people over the years. These volunteers have helped not only local people but also many visitors from other locations in Canada, as well as from around the world, especially Germany. Those who have visited us have left with a whole new knowledge of their family heritage.

There are many tools and records available to the genealogy research group. These include a constantly updated version of GRANDMA (The Genealogical Registry and Database of Mennonite Ancestry (the updated version is only available to various archives), original copies of *Der Bote*, *Die Mennonitische Rundschau*, the *Canadian Mennonite*, the *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, and numerous other resources.

Many people have donated books written about their family to the Society. These books may hold many hidden family links that can help others piece the ancestral details of their family together. We encourage anyone who has a family book that he or she no longer needs, or who has an extra copy, to donate it to MHSBC so that others might be helped.

Also included in our collection are community history books, particularly books written about various Saskatchewan communities. Some include private family stories that can provide insight into what life was like while families worked their homesteads in the very early 1900s.

The genealogy research group uses these and many other resources to attempt to locate an individual's ancestors.

Are you looking for ancestors?

Please email us at genealogy@mhsbc.com, and the volunteers will attempt to locate information for

you. In general we do not charge for our services, although there are charges for paper (10 cents a page) and postage. Of course, if you are happy with the information you receive, a donation to MHSBC would be much appreciated. There are times when the amount of paper to be generated is quite substantial. In these instances we would email you a pdf file, for which there would be a flat rate charge. There have been instances when the output generated has totalled several hundred pages. All of these options would be discussed with you prior to any final outcome.

If we are unable to locate anything in our records we could post a request for information in this newsletter.

Looking for volunteers

In general, genealogical research is done on Wednesdays by a dedicated group of volunteers. This group is looking to expand to other days of the week, and as such would need additional volunteers to cover the other days. If this type of volunteering interests you, please contact us at genealogy@mhsbc.com. You would need to attend on a number of Wednesdays for training until you felt comfortable to help on other days of the week.

We are looking forward to helping you during your visit or hearing from you by email or "snail mail." For those without access to email, send a letter to

MHSBC – Genealogy Request
211 - 2625 Clearbrook Rd
Abbotsford, BC, V2T 6S3

The Wiebe Clock

by Richard Thiessen

Growing up on Windsor Street in Chilliwack, I was fortunate to have my “grandmother” living right across the street. I should clarify that she wasn’t my actual grandmother but my paternal grandmother’s cousin. She and her husband took my father into their family when he arrived in Canada as a 20-year-old single man in 1949, and they accepted him as one of their own.

I loved walking across the street to visit Grandma Wiebe. She had so many stories to tell about life in Russia both before and after the Revolution. As a young girl, she had lived across the street from my Thiessen great-great-grandparents, as well as my grandfather before he married. Now she lived across the street from my Dad and me. She had been the neighbour to five generations of my family!

When I was young I would sit in her bedroom and admire her Russian clock high up on the wall. At the top of the clock it said “1852” – that was 110 years before I was born! The pendulum would swing back and forth – tick, tick, tick, tick. I noticed that it only had an hour hand. I assumed that this was because in those years, one only needed to know the hour of the day, and that minutes weren’t

all that important.

Through-out all those years, the clock travelled – and kept time faithfully – across Western Canada with the Wiebe family. Aron Peter Wiebe (1889-1960) and Elizabeth (Delesky) Wiebe (1894-1990) arrived in Canada on 3 May 1928, having emigrated

from Prangenau in the Molotschna Mennonite Settlement. Aron was born in Friedensruh, Molotschna, and Elizabeth was born in Prangenau, Molotschna. They were married in 1919 and settled in Prangenau, where four of their five children were born. Aron and Elizabeth chose to bring their Mandtler clock, manufactured in the Molotschna Mennonite Settlement in 1852, to Canada. The clock was inherited by Aron from his parents, Peter and Katharina Wiebe, and was most likely owned by the Wiebe family for approximately 70 years before it was received by Aron and Elizabeth.

After arriving in Quebec, Aron and Elizabeth settled in Watrous, Saskatchewan, before making their way to Winnipegosis, Manitoba. They settled in Yarrow in 1939 and retired in Chilliwack. Aron died in 1960 and Elizabeth lived alone for 20 years until she moved to Richmond to live with her daughter Martha. Several years later Elizabeth and Martha moved to Abbotsford, where Elizabeth passed away in 1990, just a few weeks after having celebrated her 96th birthday.

Aron and Elizabeth had five children: Kay Isaak, Lucy Epp, Martha Wiebe, Aron Wiebe, and Frieda Andem. All are still alive, with the oldest three having celebrated their 90th birthday. The family graciously agreed to donate the clock to MHSBC in 2012, and it now hangs proudly on the MHSBC Archives wall. The clock, in original condition, except for the replacement of the chain, still keeps good time and was recently cleaned and serviced by Hartmut Isaak of Abbotsford, a descendant of the Mandtlers who originally manufactured the clock.

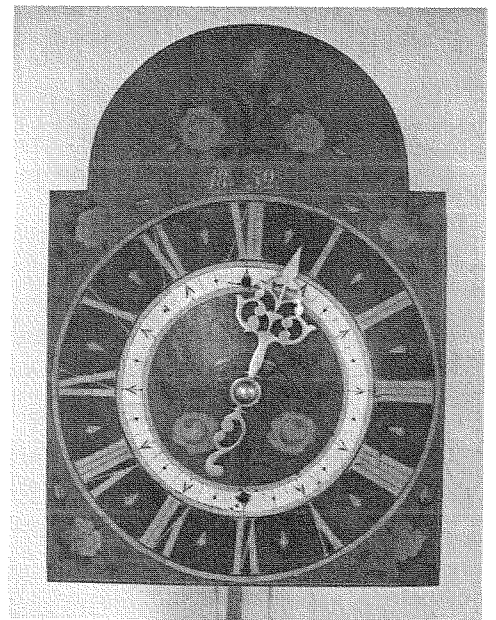


Photo: Richard Thiessen



Left to right: Lucy Epp, Frieda Andem, and Martha Wiebe, daughters of Aron and Elizabeth Wiebe. Photo courtesy of Richard Thiessen

BOOK REVIEWS

Klassen, Maureen S. *It Happened in Moscow: a memoir of discovery*. Winnipeg, MB, & Goessel, KS: Kindred Productions, 2013.

Reviewed by Harry Loewen

After Herbert and Maureen Klassen published the biography of Herbert's father, Cornelius F. Klassen (1894-1954), *Ambassador to His People: C. F. Klassen and the Russian Mennonite Refugees* (1990), it appeared that most of what CF Klassen had been and done was generally known. The Mennonite world knew that CF, as he was generally called, was the man who through his tireless work had enabled thousands of Mennonite refugees to leave the Soviet Union, both in the 1920s and particularly after the Second World War, to find safety and new homes in North and South America.

When CF suddenly died in 1954 in Germany at the age of 59, his life and contributions were celebrated among Mennonites throughout Germany, Canada, the United States, and South America. Mennonite leaders, many of whom had been CF's co-workers, such as Pastor Otto Schowalter and Benjamin H. Unruh in Germany, Harold S. Bender in Goshen, Indiana, J.J. Thiessen, David Toews, B.B. Janz, and Frank Epp in Canada, among many others, spoke to large audiences of the invaluable services CF had rendered to his co-religionists in need (*Ambassador* 254-58). To his fellow workers, including Peter F. Froese in Moscow and Peter and Elfrieda Dyck in Europe and South America, CF had been an inspiration for their own relief work.

A tall and imposing figure wherever he appeared, CF was perceived by some Mennonites as vain and demanding, especially by those immigrants who were constantly reminded by him to pay off their *Reiseschuld* (travel debt) to the Canadian Pacific Railway as soon as possible. But many others, perhaps the majority, regarded him as a humble and self-sacrificing servant of his people, one who almost approached sainthood. Describing his work as "*Ich suche meine Brüder*" (I'm in search of my brethren), he assured refugees that God is able: "*Gott kann*" (God can) became the motto of CF's life, courage and faith.

Yet the generally open, transparent and public life and work of CF was not all there was to this

man, as Maureen Klassen's new book, *It Happened in Moscow: a memoir of discovery*, shows. CF's marriage in Moscow to Mary Martha Brieger, a divorced Lutheran woman from Riga, Latvia, did not sit well with some Mennonites. CF, in fact, withdrew from the Mennonite Brethren (MB) church before they married; later in Canada, when Mary was baptized in the MB church, CF was readmitted. CF and Mary never talked about the early part of their relationship, neither to their children nor their relatives. In fact, their oldest son, Harold, was sixteen before he was told that CF was not his biological father.

In *Ambassador to His People*, Mary's first husband is not even given a name. We are told that when Mary "was in St. Petersburg during the chaotic days of the Revolution ... she met and fell in love with a Mennonite music student, who had come up to the big city from the Crimea.... [When] she visited his family and the Mennonite community in the Crimea she was so impressed with the sincerity and piety of these people that she [a Lutheran] resolved to become one of them. They were married soon afterward, but she found out to her great regret that under his charm and behind his musical talent was a weakness of character that, after they had moved to Moscow, manifested itself in an instability that made him an unreliable provider and, finally, an unfaithful husband. It was not long after their first child was born that it became evident that he was seeing other women, one of whom, a Russian girl, was also carrying his child. It was at this point that he disappeared out of her life" (*Ambassador* 74).

The discovery that shed new light on Mary's first husband, Jakob Reimer, and his relationship to the Klassen family began in 1993. Herb and Maureen Klassen, working on a Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) assignment in Moscow, received an unexpected telephone call from Erika Reimer Gurieva, a daughter of Jakob Reimer from his second marriage to Vera Protopopova. The Klassens invited Erika to their apartment. She arrived with a photo album with pictures of her father. One photo showed Jakob Reimer and Mary; in another Jakob held Harold in his arms. Other photos were of gatherings of the Reimer family. As Erica talked, the hitherto empty spaces of CF and Mary's time in Moscow in the 1920s began to fill in. Eventually Erika was able to meet her brother Harold, first in Moscow and later in Canada.

Perhaps the most interesting part of Jakob Reimer's life and his relationship to the Klassens was revealed in KGB (Soviet security) interrogation files from 1937. In the year 1937, the trials, exiles and executions of assumed enemies of the Soviet state peaked. Many who were considered to be subversives and spies, including *kulaks* (land or property owners), citizens who corresponded with foreign relatives, professionals accused of sabotaging state property, and just ordinary citizens – all such persons were deemed dangerous to the Soviet state. They were arrested, often in the dead of the night, imprisoned, and on trumped up charges tried and usually found guilty. While these “enemies of the Soviet state” were found among all nationalities, Soviet Germans, including Mennonites, were especially targeted because they were generally well to do, religious, and anti-Communist (Peter Letkemann, “Mennonite Victims of the ‘Great Terror,’ 1936-1938,” *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 16 (1998).)

Among those arrested and executed was Jakob Reimer. His daughter Erika, in her dogged persistence, was finally able to get access to the KGB files in Moscow, even acquiring a transcript of the questions and answers in the interrogation. In 2000, she sent the Klassens in Canada a twelve-page text which included questions asked by interrogators and her father's answers.

Some questions dealt with Reimer's connection to CF and other possible contacts in the West. Reimer did not deny knowing and corresponding with CF, but insisted that such contacts were not subversive but merely expressions of friendship, and that, after all, his son, now fourteen years of age, was living with the Klassens in Canada. Being a musician, Reimer was asked about his playing “fascist anthems on the piano,” which he flatly denied, saying, “I never played fascist anthems. I only played English and German hymns” (*Moscow* 155). Asked why he had not served in the Red Army, Reimer said he did not want to fight as a soldier. In addition, two “witnesses,” who had worked with Reimer in Tashkent, were brought in to portray him as a

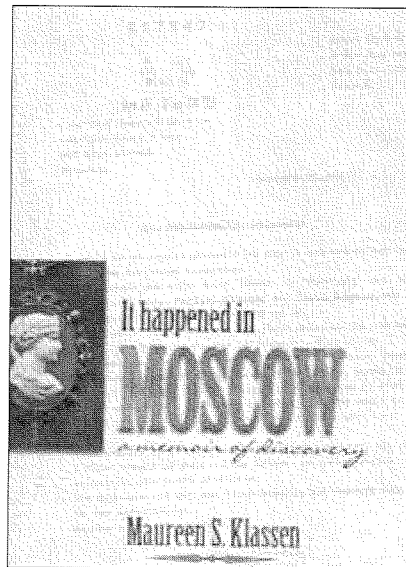
negligent engineer and saboteur of state-owned machinery. These two men in later years admitted that they had lied during Reimer's trial, and that Reimer had been an upright man and an efficient worker.

Klassen observes, “It is clear from this line of questioning ... that they were trying to construct a case of espionage and treason against Reimer, a case that would give them cause to condemn him to the firing squad” (*Moscow* 154). On December 23, 1937, Reimer was found guilty as charged, and on December 29 of that year he was shot to death in Moscow (157).

The fate of Jakob Reimer was similar to that of thousands of other Mennonite and non-Mennonite victims of Stalin's paranoia and cruelty during the mid-1930s, as the book shows. Even the format of Reimer's interrogation is similar to many other such cases. For Mennonites living in

the Soviet Union at the time, the description of Reimer's fate is nothing new. As early as 1949 and 1954, A.A. Toews, in his two volumes of *Mennonitische Märtyrer* (Mennonite Martyrs), told stories of what the many Mennonite victims suffered. Since the collapse of the regime, the Soviet archives have been opened and made accessible to the children of condemned men and women, and the truth of these stories has been confirmed. The unjustly condemned persons have now been declared “rehabilitated.” Perhaps there is not much comfort in that!

Klassen's memoir does not suggest that Jakob Reimer did not make mistakes, especially with regard to his relationship with Mary, but hints at possible reasons why he left Mary for another woman. Reimer emerges as one who was caught in the cross-currents of the politics, ideology, and moral values of the Revolution, although it is not known to what extent he was influenced by them. With his career transfer to Tashkent, Uzbekistan, which separated him effectively from his first wife and child, his break with Mary was complete. But, according to Erica, her father always was and remained a “good man” (*Moscow* 40). He continued to love his son Harold, and there was no doubt, according to Erika, that he loved his new family as well. Interestingly,



he also valued and maintained his friendship with CF, and apparently remained true to some of his Mennonite beliefs and values, such as nonresistance. Reimer certainly appears a much better man than what was said about him in *Ambassador*, and Klassen regrets the way he was characterized in the earlier book.

It happened in Moscow, is, however, as much about Mary, as it is about Jakob Reimer. Klassen reflects on how difficult Mary's divorce and remarriage must have been for her – difficulties that are only hinted at in the book. Yet this did not hinder Mary from being the woman in CF's life without whom his important public service was unthinkable. Maureen Klassen, who also came to the Mennonite community from a non-Mennonite background, can understand Mary very well. She discovers that Mary was not only a loving wife, a good mother to her children, and a strong woman in her own right, but also an efficient manager of the Klassen household. For example, she was in complete charge of material and economic matters, including taking care of all real estate details during the Klassen's several moves in Canada. CF's long absences during his many travels abroad made Mary's being in charge necessary, and she did it without ever complaining. In fact, her tact, tenacity, sense of duty, and her love for CF and the children never seemed to leave her. Many readers will see her as the real hero in this story.

It is evident that Klassen loves Russia's art, literature, music and culture, and she weaves many of these aspects into the story as she reflects on her characters' politics and ideologies. Moreover, as a Christian, she also shows an evangelical concern for the Russian people, believing that the collapse of the Soviet Union may give religion in that country a new chance. In the book's epilogue, Klassen and her husband attend a performance of Handel's *Messiah* in the Kremlin. She writes, "I recall that as we made our way back to our apartment from that momentous evening ... I had a deep sense that things were going to be different in this beloved land of Russia from now on" (*Moscow* 207).

Overall, Maureen Klassen has written an interesting, important and unique memoir. It brings the story of beloved Mennonite leaders CF and Mary Klassen to its proper conclusion, adding the story of Jakob Reimer and fitting it into the narra-

tive of their lives. This is a fine human interest story, well researched and written. The book may well become a bestseller in Mennonite circles.

Klassen, Peter P. *Elisabeth: Aus dem Tagebuch eines mennonitischen Mädchens in Gran Chaco (Elisabeth: From the Diary of a Mennonite Woman in Gran Chaco)*.

Asunción, Paraguay: Editora Litocolor. Published by Verein für Geschichte und Kultur der Mennoniten in Paraguay, 2009.

Reviewed by David Giesbrecht

Peter P. Klassen was an uncommonly enjoyable storyteller and published author who immigrated to Paraguay in 1929. After his professional training which included study in Switzerland and Germany, he became a teacher, and was for many years the editor of the *Mennoblatt* (a German language Paraguayan Mennonite periodical).

Klassen's novel *Elisabeth* flows with richly articulated German vocabulary. The story captures the epic experiences of a Mennonite community from its 1930 origins in the Paraguayan Chaco until just after World War II. The era is vividly recalled through the voice of Elisabeth Unruh, poignantly describing her own development and that of her village over a seventeen year span. The Unruh family represents the pilgrimage of many South American Mennonites who against all odds escaped the horrors of Soviet Russia, only to be faced with the staggering difficulty of a new beginning in the torrid Chaco jungle.

With her first tentative entry on 20 October 1932, the sixteen-year-old Elisabeth Unruh begins to explore the ever-changing dynamics of a tightly knit Mennonite community. There is of course the first-generation longing for that idealized Russian homeland, hauntingly enshrined in the name of the new colony, Fernheim, literally, "distant home." Through succeeding diary entries, readers are introduced not only to Elisabeth's four siblings and her parents, but also to a cast of richly drawn characters around whom community life evolves.

The prescient Elisabeth helps us experience the hope of new beginnings in a new society, patterned after the immigrants' previous Russian Men-

nonite village life. The first hovels soon become substantial residences. With amazing adaptability, farmers learn how to grow cotton and other tropical crops. And then there is utter dismay when promising crops are ravaged by a vast cloud of voracious grasshoppers, leaving only despair in their wake.

Through entries in her diary, readers accompany Elisabeth to interminable church services in her General Conference church, where Pastor Reimer labours mightily to shepherd his flock in this new setting. Often the spiritual tempo of this community is quickened by the earnest eschatological preaching of visiting evangelists. This is a community acutely aware of tensions between Mennonite Brethren and General Conference members, with frequent comparisons of practices between the two groups injecting distemper into the village.

Elisabeth's diary effectively allows a variety of village voices to be heard. There is for instance her brother David, a model of piety, often expressing his dour outlook on shallow spirituality, especially among young people. By contrast, her favourite brother Jasch has become impatient with church-dominated, restrictive village life, and has left to experience the big city in Asunción. Her mother mostly languishes over the difficult present circumstances and the fate of her erring children, while Elisabeth's practical father is suspicious of zealous piety, especially the MB variety. In this community young lovers who trespass church standards face serious discipline and shunning. The beautiful Elisabeth herself agonizes on how to respond to the amorous approaches of Heinrich Friesen, who is not a "believer," but passionately in love with her.

With rich insight, *Elisabeth* describes differing Mennonite responses to the Chaco War (1932–1935) that was fought between Bolivia and Paraguay for control of the northern Gran Chaco region. Often the front lines traversed through Fernheim. For young Mennonite men the drama of war becomes a welcome diversion from drab village life. Guarding young women from undisciplined troops, caring for wounded soldiers, and hauling provisions for the next battle are all war-related activities that reflect the travail of this community as it struggles to position itself between allegiance to a historic Mennonite peace position and the sometimes lucrative involvement in the nearby hostilities.

Distinguishing between war and peace be-

comes an even more pressing theme with the approach of World War II. Given that Paraguayan Mennonites had in significant measure been rescued from Soviet tyranny by Germany, the novel describes how this community formed an uncritical loyalty to Germany, and saw, in the emergence of Hitler, God's provision to defeat all that godless Communism represented in their tortured memories. Thus, Elisabeth often comments on the inordinate desire among her people to immigrate to Germany after the war. Indeed, young Mennonites commonly profess their eagerness to join the *Wehrmacht*, if only the opportunity might arise.

Unfortunately, the author seems to wander from his original purposes in the latter part of the story. As many others do, Elisabeth eventually leaves Fernheim to find her future in Asunción. Bizarrely, in the big city she finds employment with prominent German nationalists. Her new employers are so impressed with her trustworthy demeanour that they arrange for her to work for one of Hitler's agents in Buenos Aires, where against her better judgement she is to inform her handlers when ships leave the harbour, so they can be torpedoed by U-boats lying in wait off shore.

As the war ends Elisabeth is informed that her mother has died. Dutifully, she returns to Fernheim to look after her now aged father. However, her taste of independence has come with a heavy price. To rid her troubled conscience of its guilt, she publically confesses her sins in the Fernheim Mennonite church and re-enters village life. However, she cannot escape the yearning for liberation, the result of her years away from the controls she once again reluctantly embraces.

For readers who can manage German, this novel is highly commended.

The following is an extract from *Elisabeth*, pages 127-31.

Translated by Robert Martens

July 9, 1933

Wednesday evening. Actually an unusual day to write down my thoughts. Mostly I take time for this on Saturday or Sunday. But once again something has happened that disturbs me so much that I must write it down. On Sunday evening I was com-

pletely distraught, and the cause was Father. Probably he doesn't know at all how much he has disturbed my tranquillity and the firm stand that I've struggled so hard to maintain.

It seldom happens, but we were all home that evening. We were sitting in our warm kitchen and everything was very pleasant. On account of the cold south wind we squeezed even closer together. Jasch sat by the oven and poured himself *maté*. The young people have learned this. He poured water from the kettle on the oven. Father doesn't usually drink either *maté* or *tereré*, but now he took a few sips. "Can't hurt," he said, and we laughed.

I don't know anymore how the conversation turned to the wedding at the Loewens, but soon there was a quarrel. Jasch had also left after Onkel Loewen forbade playing games. He's seventeen already, and thinks that the young people have the right to disagree with that kind of thing. Then David gave him a real raking over. He said that Jasch should have stayed there and set a good example for his friends, especially now that he will soon finish school and knows the meaning of order and decency. Also he said that the words of the youth leader should have been taken seriously by all the boys in the village, who seem to just hang around on the streets.

And then, just when I was swaying between Jasch, whom I love so much, and David, whose piety I so greatly respect, Father broke in and upset me completely.

"What Onkel Loewen did wasn't right," declared Father, "you can't keep down the youth that way. The result will be that young people really will hang around on the streets, because they have nothing to do and get bored." And then Father told us something from his youth, about which I had previously known nothing.

He said that in his village the young people had danced at weddings, lovely dances that required a lot of practice. The older people sat around in a circle and watched and enjoyed themselves. He said that everything would be just as orderly and decent here if it was allowed.

At that Mother dropped her knitting and looked at him in astonishment. "You too, you want our children to dance? We don't want the lax ways of the old church like it was in Russia. Preacher Reimer doesn't want that anymore."

"I like the new ideas in our community too," said Father after a pause. "But why should we throw out the baby with the bath water? To forbid harmless games isn't only wrong, it's also stupid and dangerous. The result will be that the young people will have nothing to do, and then the sad situations happen that we hear so much about. Isn't that also being lax?"

"I will abide by what the teacher says, and by what we have decided in the youth group," said David with finality. "We will not laze around and disappear into the darkness. We are opposed to anything that is lax and leads to sin."

Father continued speaking as if he hadn't even heard David. "Everything wasn't so lax in Russia as people think," he said. "Men like Onkel Loewen are too strict; they think that they alone can decide what is good or bad, and no one dares to argue with them."

We listened closely to what Father told us about Russia, and then suddenly Jasch broke in. "I want to get out, out of this village and this colony. I'm suffocating here. How good it is in Germany now! Friedrich Piehl writes me that he's happy in Mölln, that he's *Hitlerjugend*. They march and sing songs, they do gymnastics and live an active life. I want a life like that, with a uniform like Fritz is wearing in the photo he sent me."

"And our Mennonite heritage," David said calmly, "and our nonresistance and the beliefs of our fathers?"

"I'm going to bed," said Jasch, "tomorrow I have to be up early for school."

So our comfortable circle broke up, and each was left alone, with different thoughts, opinions, and wishes. Is Father really unhappy inside, even though he holds his tongue for the sake of peace in the village? He certainly doesn't want a quarrel with Onkel Loewen, and it seems to me that Onkel Loewen, with all his piety, is stronger. Were people like Father the strongest back in Russia? When it comes to faith and belief, why should anyone be strongest anyway?

I've become afraid for Jasch, that perhaps he doesn't feel at home in our community. What will happen to him? I slipped out, said good night to Jasch in his dark room, and then crept under my own warm covers.

David Leung, Stewardship Ministry, MB Conference

An online interview with Robert Martens

David Leung moved from Hong Kong to the US as a teenager, but soon achieved several degrees in computer science, accounting, and management consulting. He was only 25 when he was offered a senior position with a firm in Regina. In 1979 he became a member of Regina Chinese Alliance Church. David moved to Vancouver where he met and married Ruth Chan, daughter of Stephen Chan, who had served as pastor at Richmond Chinese Alliance Church and Richmond Chinese Mennonite Brethren Church. Ruth and David consequently became part of the MB constituency. When David's mother suffered a severe heart attack, David decided to leave the technology business. In 2005 he joined the board of Stewardship Ministries, where he serves to this day. He notes that "I started well, married well, and hope to finish well."

We extend our apologies to Mr. Leung for the long delay in publishing this article. The interview took place in the aftermath of the recent global financial meltdown.

Reddig, Ken. "Stories we live by." www.mbconf.ca

Could you tell us something about your personal background, upbringing, education, etc? How did you connect with the Mennonite Brethren Church? How did you get involved in finances?

I was born and raised in Hong Kong, educated in the United States, and am a member of the Stewardship Ministries of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches. Prior to full time ministry, I held senior executive positions with a number of information technology and manage-

ment consulting companies in Canada. I received Bachelor and Master Degrees from the University of Minnesota, and am also a chartered accountant and a certified management consultant. I am additionally a Canadian representative of MCC for the Canadian Conference of MB Churches, as well as the Vice Chairman of the Board of Union Gospel Mission, Vancouver.

Since people want to help each other, help them find a way to do so with Stewardship as the intermediary.

How long has the Stewardship Ministry been part of the MB Church, and what were the reasons for its establishment? How does it function?

Caring for and helping each other has been part of our denomination from the start and was demonstrated in helping financially as a group from the start. By the

1900s mission endowment funds were in evidence and earnings being used to support mission work internationally. The first evidence of collectively accumulating money to help build a church was in the early 1900s. However, there was no rapid expansion of the program; it was very needs-based with little formal organization.

The Canadian Conference was officially formed by an Act of Parliament in 1945 and gave us very broad powers in terms of banking privileges – rights that we would presume impossible for a charity being formed now. Very little actual development, though, actually occurred for the next number of years as the work continued under the guidance of the North American Conference which was US based. By 1969 the Fund was at \$2 Million.

In 1973, Stewardship formally began, in response to the growth of the Canadian Conference in relation to its US counterpart and the increased need of churches for loans. In 1983 the addition of the RRSP program spelled a significant change in

the size and direction of the fund. Loan demand continued to soar and for the next 15 years the challenge was to continue to keep enough depositors in the system to match the loan demand. A number of key people advanced significant amounts of funds to make this happen. As well, in the mid-1990s, the US Stewardship Fund advanced significant funds to help advance additional loans in Canada.

By this time, however, the momentum of the fund was changing. The Stewardship reps in Canada had been actively providing estate planning and will preparation services in Canada for some time, most actively since the late 1980s, and the awareness created about financial services was showing success.

Until 2000, we continued a strategy of just matching deposit levels with loan demand, but after this date a more aggressive stance was taken to try to provide additional funds for ministry by accepting more deposits and reinvesting in other sources if loan demand was less. By now, the Stewardship team had grown to a representative in most provinces, most churches had ready access to the program, and this awareness resulted in significant growth. During this span a number of new programs have been added, opening Stewardship up to a larger audience.

Throughout the 100 years the principles of stewardship have remained largely the same:

1. Do things together that you can't do alone.
2. Since people want to help each other, help them find a way to do so with Stewardship as the intermediary.
3. We have a heart for reaching the lost. Find ways to help people find a way to help local and international missions.
4. Help people learn Christian stewardship principles that they can employ in day-to-day life and give them tools to make it happen.
5. Honour God with the funds put in our care. Treat them with care and respect and use them to help build His kingdom here on earth.

**Let us not forget
we are living in a
highly capitalistic
and profit-driven
culture.**

What is your role as stewardship adviser? Is there travel involved, personal counselling, group instruction, and online service?

I do group instructions, sermons, and personal counselling, mostly in BC.

What is the meaning of "stewardship?" Does it involve a responsibility to society, to the poor, to the environment, etc?

In the context of Stewardship Ministries within the Canadian Conference of MB Churches, we refer "stewardship" mostly to time, talents and treasures (money).

What can the church do to encourage good stewardship? What can we as individuals do?

The church can certainly be proactive in heightening the awareness of being a good money steward through preaching, workshops, and other personal counselling services. We as individuals can do the same through constant reminders that we are only managers during our lifetime with what the Lord has entrusted us. He owns and we manage. Living within and below our means is certainly a step in the right direction.

How should we view the global economy? As an opportunity? As a problem? A challenge? Should we engage in "ethical investments?"

The global economy is still in a pretty precarious position. I would view this situation as an opportunity to get back to the basics in terms of how we view materials and money.

What are the challenges of stewardship in the current economic downturn? Are there specific Christian and/or Mennonite responses?

Over the last six months, we have witnessed the most dramatic and unprecedented change in our economy in recent memory – a global banking crisis, followed by a significant worldwide stock market decline, and a severe economic recession. These chain reactions have caused major financial losses,

...continued next page.

Roots and Branches

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...continued from page 26.

not to mention emotional suffering and spiritual meltdown for many. Most of us are wondering what will happen and what to do next; unfortunately, no one has a crystal ball. Many financial advisors continue to comfort us by reiterating that over the long term, equity markets tend to move higher and we should ensure that our portfolio is positioned to benefit from the rebound when it occurs.

While I do not disagree with what most financial “experts” suggest, I submit that, as stewards of God’s resources, the most crucial step in moving forward is to take it upon ourselves to improve our financial literacy. This will allow us to make better judgements with or without the assistance of others. Let us not forget we are living in a highly capitalistic and profit-driven culture. Everybody wants money, but ironically very few understand it, except for those who create and market different investment instruments. And that lack of understanding is what led to subprime. If we take out the greed and the financial misrepresentation, the root cause of this crisis is massive levels of financial illiteracy.

How and where do we start if we resolve to improve our FQ (financial quotient)?

There are many avenues to pursue, ranging from books, tapes, and seminars to internet research. One golden nugget I highly recommend is the InvestRight website published by the BC Securities Commission (www.investright.org).

InvestRight is both free and independent. It is the BC Securities Commission's one-stop resource for investors to educate themselves on how to make informed investment decisions. The InvestRight website provides a wide range of tools to help investors develop the critical thinking skills they need to protect themselves – information such as how to choose and work with advisors, company background checks, investment products, a scam meter, and video clips from victims of investment fraud. It also provides basic information for people who want to start an investment plan as well as those who want to play a more active role in their investments. InvestRight is also a channel for registering complaints about advisors and companies for misconducts and scams.

Vor dem Gericht

Wie ein Tropfen sich ähnelt mit dem anderen
so fliehn meine Tage dahin,
Ich möchte ins Freie mal wandern,
Ich weiß das ich unschuldig bin.

Du einsames, banges Erwarten
vor dem Nachtverhör und dem Gericht,
das Fragen nach allerlei Arten
des Richters so strenges Gesicht.

Wenn Nachts dann so klappern die Türen,
der Schlüssel erdrönet im Schloß,
wo werden sie mich jetzt hinführen?
Man meldet mir, “вас на допрос.”*

Der Richter muß es ja entscheiden,
was mit mir geschehen soll,
doch kann ich's vielleicht auch vermeiden
wenn das Schicksal mich freilassen will.

18-1-1935

*Direct translation: “you on interrogation”

As one drop resembles another, so my days flee by.
How I long for freedom: I am innocent.

Alone and terrified, I await this night's interrogation,
the judge's stern face, the questioning.

At night, amid rattling of doors, a key thuds in the lock.
Where will they take me now? “To interrogation!”

The judge will determine my destiny—
yet perhaps, if fate wills, I may be set free.

Author unknown. This poem, written in a Soviet labour
camp, was found in the MHSBC archives.

Prison in Zaporizhia. Photo: Louise Bergen Price

