

Roots and branches

Newsletter 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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Paraguayan settlers gathered around bottle tree in this painting by Edith Krause

Mennonite Historical Society of BC 211-2825 Clearbrook Rd., Abbotsford, BC. V2T 6S3

Phone: 604-853-6177 Fax: 604-853-6246 Email: archives@mhsbc.com

website: www.mhsbc.com

Hours: 9am-4pm Monday-Friday

Editorial

Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. – James 2:17

The music was, perhaps, the first clue. A large and varied amplified band onstage, the impassioned congregational singing led by Paul Dueck, the hymnbooks, the swaying and clapping – most of the music at the Mennonite World Conference originated in the developing world. Joyful harmonies from poverty-stricken lands. Choruses from Africa, South America, Asia, energetic and emotional. The global Mennonite Church is shifting into the Southern Hemisphere.

The Spanish-speaking congregations of Paraguay, one young woman told me, are top-heavy with the young – quite the opposite of some of our greying memberships in North America and Europe. While our prosperous Western conferences may be stable, they seem to have become, to some extent, an appendage of the thriving churches of, for example, Congo, Zimbabwe, Vietnam, or Colombia. At the megachurch complex in Asunción where the Mennonite World Conference took place, only a scattering of the Bible studies and sermons were delivered by North American speakers. Blunt and prophetic talks on Jesus and social justice were delivered by representatives from the developing world. Action was emphasized – action for peace and justice, emanating from a common ground, from the continuing story of a "historic peace church," and above all, from walking "the Jesus way."

At this *Congreso Mundial Menonita* (Spanish was spoken far more than any other language), the idea of community in diversity was pre-eminent. The poorer among us are challenging the individualism of our prosperous Western congregations, and to some degree assuming the moral leadership of the global Church. A speaker from war-torn Colombia remarked that God's kingdom thrives under crisis. Do we in the West, who have achieved such affluence, and have not known serious crisis for so many years, have the wisdom and discernment to hear the urgings of our poorer brothers and sisters?

by Robert Martens

Upcoming Events

Fall banquet: Evening in Paraguay with lecturer Dr. Jacob Warkentin. October 17, 2009, 6 p.m. at Eben-Ezer Mennonite Church, 2051 Windsor Rd. Abbotsford. Tickets \$20, available from board members or the archive office.

Jacob Warkentin was born in Fürstenberg, Ukraine, and grew up in Germany and Paraguay. He earned his PhD from the Phillips University in Marlberg, and has taught in Kolonie Neuland and in Germany. Dr. Warkentin's most recent publication is "*Erziehung und Bildung in einer Siedlungsgemeinschaft.*" (*Nurture and Education in a Colony Community*).

The topic for Dr. Warkentin's lecture is "The Mennonites of Paraguay: New and Old Challenges." He states, "When the Mennonites as of 1927 arrived in three major sections, their first concern was to see to their own existence by creating an autonomous settlement structure and by sharing their evangelical faith with the native population. In the following [lecture], an attempt will be made to show what has become of these intentions." Dr. Warkentin will set the lecture in the context of "the country in which they were able to settle so freely, and in which they were able to constitute their lives according to their own principles and customs." The scope of the lecture will be limited to German speaking Mennonites, and the English speaking mission congregations from North America.

November 2009. Genealogy workshop. Please call the office for date and time.

May 8, 2010. Lecture: "Mennonite Women in Canada" by Marlene Epp.

Epp's book, *Mennonite Women in Canada*, is available from the archives.



Roots and Branches is a publication of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC and is mailed three times per year to those who donate \$25.00 or more per year. All donations will be receipted for tax purposes. Your contributions are needed to further this work! **Directors:** Ben Braun, Connie Braun, David Giesbrecht, John Konrad, Robert Martens, Peter Neudorf, Helen Rose Pauls, Wilf Penner, Louise Bergen Price, Richard Thiessen & John B. Toews. **Editor:** Louise Bergen Price. **Contributing editors:** Connie Braun & Robert Martens **Archive Directors:** David Giesbrecht, Harry Heidebrecht **Staff:** Mary Ann Quiring & Elisabeth Klassen **Copy editing:** Hugo and Jean Friesen

From the archives: Tributes to Erica

Erica Sawatzky Suderman, 1938-2009



Erica Suderman has been a constant, caring friend to me for forty years. Peter and Erica reached out in friendship to our family when we moved to BC in 1969. Erica was a dedicated teacher/librarian of gifted and talented students in the Abbotsford school district, and upon her retirement in 1998 began work in the Archives at the Mennonite Historical Society. She was passionate about getting all those boxes into proper archival order and usually took work home with her on her memory stick.

Erica saw the big picture but could also isolate the smallest details in archival description and was really particular about entering the data correctly. She recruited many volunteers and did a gallant job of training and overseeing the many facets of numerous projects. She appreciated everyone's contribution and generously praised her volunteer family. We depended on her expertise and so missed her terribly when she was diagnosed with cancer and her energy declined.

It was a privilege to work alongside Erica. She had hoped that her goal of making our archive collection electronically searchable would have been farther along when she got sick. Just two days before her passing, we had a lively conversation in the hospital about data entry into InMagic. Her mind was still

very much in gear.

We must now carry on by referring to the manual instead of the easier "Let's ask Erica" route. We will miss her positive, encouraging leadership at the "office." We intend to honour her by continuing faithfully in achieving the goals that she had set for herself and for the Archives.

While we will miss her presence in our circle, we know that Peter and the family will feel the loss even more keenly. Our heartfelt sympathy goes out to them.

Lora Sawatzky

Erica began volunteering with us in 2000. Her last shift was June 18, a mere 17 days ago. Her body was already saying no, but her irrepressible spirit wanted so much to see her beloved InMagic project through to the end.

One of the very big projects Erica headed up was the creation of an index to all the obituaries in the *Mennonitische Rundschau* and *Der Bote*, two Mennonite papers together representing close to 200 years of publication. This was a time-consuming, long-range task. Some 70,000 indexed names later, this information is now available on our website.

There is, however, another, even larger undertaking that we will long associate with Erica. Several years ago we made a far-reaching decision in our office to purchase InMagic, an archival management software package. Here is where Erica made an indelible contribution in our Center. She had an amazing gift for detail, and patience and motivation to see a project through, and in the last four years we made great progress towards providing a useful finding aid to our archival records. Unfortunately, as much as she wanted to, Erica was not able to see this InMagic project through to completion.

At the request of the family, funds being contributed in Erica's memory will remain an open account with all designations going towards the completion of the InMagic project, particularly, to provide volunteer training and to purchase the necessary equipment. In this way, Erica's legacy will carry on. On behalf of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC, I want to thank the Sudermans for this very gracious offer, and all those contributing to this fund.

It is impossible to fully express the range of Erica's contributions in our Center, or the sad awareness that she will no more be part of our team. But over against the loss we all feel so keenly, I also want us all to hear these words of Scripture: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord ..." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labour, for their deeds will follow them."

To my friend and colleague, Erica Suderman, rest in that peace which you so richly deserve. David Giesbrecht

Events: Gospel Music

The sound of gospel songs filled the King Road MB church on June 14 as hundreds of voices joined in singing songs popular in our churches in the last century. There's a richness and beauty when Mennonite congregational singing is unhindered by amplifiers and other noisemakers.

Gospel songs were a staple in Mennonite church life in the previous century; now they are rapidly fading into disuse. Musicologist Evan Kreider, in tracing the development and popularity of these hymns, noted that gospel songs grew out of the great revivals of the 1850s.

By the late 1800s some Mennonite churches began using gospel songs, first in evening services

and for youth groups. Eventually they became part of Sunday morning services. "Successful revival movements bring an energy to church life," said Kreider, citing the Brunk revival services of the 1950s as an example.

Gospel songs, with tunes often adapted from popular music of the day, focus on themes of assurance, personal salvation and heightened individualism. The individualism is evident in Fanny Crosby's hymn "Blessed Assurance." Kreider observed that this hymn says, "Jesus is mine." Not *Jesus is yours, or Jesus is ours*, but *Jesus is MINE*.

Kreider noted that in earlier times children sat through the entire service – they weren't shuttled off to

children's church-- they heard and learnt all the hymns. The songs we sang in our youth go with us, he said. These songs are memories of our spiritual journey; now we are being asked to set them aside. A sad loss.

Kreider's rich historical insights were interspersed with animated congregational singing of gospel songs, accompanied by Betty Suderman.

The evening included songs by a male quartet "A Few Good Men" from the south Langley MB church and a ladies sextet from Bakerview church. Dan Nickel, and Louise Price spoke about the profound influences of hymns in their youth.

by Henry Neufeld

About Evan Kreider



Evan Kreider was raised in the Old Mennonite Church in Wadsworth, Ohio and then Goshen, IN, where he graduated from Goshen College before undertaking graduate degrees at Indiana University. Before joining the musicology department at UBC, he taught music history at the State University of New York, Geneseo. His research interests focused on church music in the middle ages and Renaissance, as well as the interplay of music and culture. Since retiring in 2007, Kreider's interests have included digital photography (www.kreiderskorner.blogspot.com), singing with *Abendmusik* and with the *Vancouver Cantata Singers*, volunteering with others at Point Grey Inter-Mennonite Fellowship, golf, and volunteering at the Mennonite Centre de Paris each spring.

Hallelujah Schöner Morgen

My parents, 1948 immigrants from Ukraine, moved to Abbotsford in the early 1950s and we attended West Abbotsford Mennonite church.

When I think of those Sunday mornings, it's always summer. The sun streams into the church's long windows, lazy flies land on hymn books and bald heads. From outside, the smell of cows and new mown hay.

We little girls sit in the front row in our starched cotton dresses and white socks, giggling and whispering. There is only one song that will do justice to the beauty of this Sunday,

Hallelujah, Schöner Morgen. There's a rustling of pages as we find the hymn, although most know it by heart, and few need the notes.

*Hallelujah! Fairest morning,
Fairer than my words can say,
Down I lay the heavy burden
Of life's toil and care to-day;
While this morn of joy and love
Brings fresh vigor from above.*

On Sundays, our world is at peace. We will do only necessary chores: no berry picking, no weeding, no clearing bush or burning stumps. We will not stop to buy gas or go out to

eat. Our parents will have a nap after lunch—*Mittagschlaf*—and after that, friends will drop over for Faspera. Often, in the evening, there will be church again, *Jugendverein*, perhaps. And then, home again, to a good night's rest:

*Let the day's sweet hours be ended
Prayerfully, as they began;
And Thy blessing Lord, be granted,
Till earth's days and weeks are done;
That at last Thy servant may
Keep eternal Sabbath day.*

by Louise Bergen Price

Historic Agreement Signed

by Helen Rose Pauls

As long awaited rain poured from the sky onto a tent with church windows in the middle of the Campus Green on June 24, 2009, agreements were signed between the University of the Fraser Valley and the *Mennonite Faith and Learning Society* for a Centre of Mennonite Studies on the campus, taking its place alongside an Aboriginal Chair and an Indo-Canadian Study Centre.

"Universities need to reflect their communities and Mennonites are a large part of that demographic," said Skip Bassford, President and Vice-Chancellor of UFV. "Mennonites have been a contributing presence both here and around the world in the areas of peace, literature and music."

Abbotsford MP Ed Fast pointed out that Mennonites have taken their place in the mainstream of Canadian life, having ten members in Canadian Parliament, while Mayor George Peary summed up his thoughts on the partnership with, "It's about time!" He spoke of the Menno Home as a place in the community that reflect Mennonite values of excellence and compassion, as well as employing 600 people.

Chancellor Brian Minter (of garden fame) mentioned his link to the Mennonite community and his appreciation of Mennonite values, as his daughter and now his grandchildren attend MEI.

Eric Davies, Vice-president academic of UFV and acting Provost, said that this was a great occasion that warmed his heart as an historian. "A community needs to see reflections of themselves in the university." He foresees a future Chair of Mennonite Studies which would combine Mennonite studies with a liberal arts education. More immediately, he proposed a three-course certificate in Mennonite History. Davies also envisioned public lectures on subjects such as: Mennonite peace tradition and conflict resolution; War and revolution in the twentieth century; Mennonite literature and music.

"Today is just the beginning," he said.

John H. Redekop, co-chair of the *Mennonite Faith and Learning Society* with Ed Janzen, remarked that twenty to twenty-five percent of local residents have a close connection to the Mennonite community.

Redekop spoke about the marginalization of Mennonites when they first arrived in the Fraser Valley eighty years ago, quoting several negative news stories about these German-speaking pacifists. "One of the reasons MEI was built was to protect our young men from harassment and injury for being pacifist," he said. He also listed achievements such as establishing berry co-ops, credit unions, agribusinesses, construction industries, manufacturing and excellence in the professions.

Co-chair Ed Janzen, who declined to make a speech because he "hailed from the more humble side of our Mennonite community," introduced those bringing fraternal greetings: Erna Friesen (Pacific Centre of Discipleship), Wayne Bremner (MCC), and Harry Heidebrecht (Mennonite Historical Society of BC). Ron Penner of Columbia Bible College spoke of the agreement as a culmination of a dream.

The many speeches were interspersed with musical interludes by Calvin Dyck (violin) John Friesen (cello) and a men's quartet from Bakerview Mennonite Brethren Church.

A hearty rendition of "Praise God From whom all Blessings Flow" in four-part harmony seemed to seal the agreement and bless the traditional refreshments: *Platz* (fruit squares) and *Zwieback* (buns) with fresh strawberry jam.

The rain outside also seemed like a blessing.



Ed Janzen, Dr. Skip Bassford and Dr. John H. Redekop sign historic document

From our readers

I wish to compliment you on your WONDERFUL newsletter. I especially appreciate "Mennonites and rulers:". We read quite a bit about our people in South Russia, and some in Prussia, but very little about when we were in Holland. THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

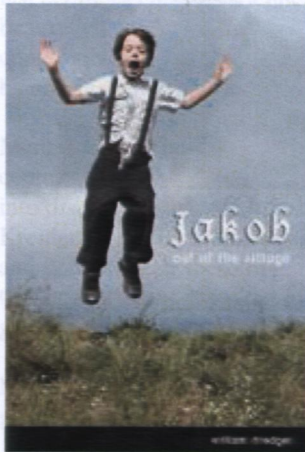
Nelly Rempel

P. S. How about an article about our sojourn in Prussia!

Book Reviews

William Driedger, *Jakob Out Of The Village*. Regina: Your Nickel's Worth, 2007.

Reviewed by Helen Grace Lescheid



Through the eyes of Jakob, the middle son of a God-fearing farming family, the joys and struggles of the Old Colony Mennonite settlements come alive in this delightful novel.

Mennonites-- seeking to live simply and frugally and to keep out of war and politics-- have come from Russia and Mexico to settle on the Canadian prairies. They face the challenges of farming during the Dirty Thirties and later, during World War II, with courage and stoicism.

Their moral compass is The Old Colony Church. Members are expected to separate themselves from the world around them in both practice and appearance. When going to town to market garden produce, the women wear ankle-length dark skirts with long-sleeved high-buttoned blouses, loose-fitted and pleated to conceal the figure. The only decorative article of clothing is a knotted shawl, hand-embroidered with a fringed hem. They walk behind their husbands, who are mostly dressed in new overalls and a navy or dark brown shirt and a tweed cap or dark felt hat.

When Jakob expresses a wish for a Christmas tree with candles and tinsel and glass balls and stars and an angel at the top like he has seen in pictures, Papa said it was pagan. It wasn't right to prettify life with decorations and adornments like lipstick, jewelry, neckties and

curtains.

But Jakob notices how Mama often looks at ruffled curtains in the catalogue and how she lingers over jewelry and other pretty things in stores when Papa isn't with them.

Anyone who is ambitious in commerce or politics risks discipline and even excommunication from the church. Jakob's own grandfather experienced such a fate. He'd left traditional farming and was trading in cattle and properties. He owned a hotel and a number of stores, an automobile, and a modern two-storey house close to town, with a verandah and polished oak floors. When he was excommunicated from the church, it made Papa even more determined to live by the law.

Jakob becomes increasingly aware of the outside world. City folk occasionally come to the village to look at his mother's flower garden and to buy vegetables from her. They dazzle him with their shiny new cars, fancy clothes and perfume-scented skin.

In his coming-of-age experiences, Jakob is left with many questions: Why are some big kids mean to smaller ones? Why was father so secretive about bringing a purebred stallion into the barn? Why were certain people not invited to the communal pig butchering? How could a girl who's not married be pregnant? What happens when one of their own is falsely accused and sent to jail? Why do some people die so young? Most adults, including his parents, are silent about such issues, and the precocious, curious Jakob looks for answers elsewhere.

While his two older brothers, Knals and Obraum, marry and become traditional farmers, Jakob yearns for something more. He leaves home to attend the School of Agriculture at the University of Saskatchewan. With enthusiasm he participates in the mandatory drills of the Canadian Officer Training Corps. He takes to the regimental marches, the parades and rifle drills easily. He also joins a debating team and wins a silver medal. Professor Ramsey invites him to join the Conservative Party after the war is over.

Upon graduation, Jakob returns to his village and the farm. At first, his father welcomes his son's suggestions on how to make cows milk-producers the year round and how to fix a piece of farm machinery. But when Jakob proposes a plan on how to make their land yield higher returns, his father becomes guarded. "If we talk too much about university learning, people will turn against us," he says. "It wouldn't be fair to your brothers."

One early morning before the others have awakened, Jakob leaves his family and village and joins the air force. Under a different name.

Driedger's concise, descriptive writing pulls the reader right into the scenes. His delightful sense of humour and his honest, clear insights into the struggles of living within a close-knit community are refreshing. His concise and descriptive writing resonates of poetic language. His novel takes us to a new level of understanding of a person's search for personal freedom.

Steven "Reece" Friesen, *Pax Avalon: Conflict Revolution*. Waterloo: Herald Press, 2008.

Reviewed by Robert Martens

BOOM! THWACK! In Avalon City, terrorists are on the attack, unknown conspirators are threatening the established order. SCHREECH! WHAROOM! WHAM! Meanwhile, a sinewy, sexy, full-lipped superheroine, swinging through the back streets, spies a robbery in progress. Another comic book vigilante? Not quite. "Okay, fighting them is out," she prays, "Lord, please give me words to move hard hearts" (55). Pax doesn't live by her fists. Instead, "You can seek forgiveness for your part," she says to the man with the knife, "one road leads to fear, the other to peace" (56). And it works. Pax is stunned by her own success. "That response was...miraculous," she thinks, "it seemed so unrealistic" (58). Robber and victim walk away together. "Think she's single?" "Sooo outa your league, man" (57).

In fact, "Reece" Friesen's new comic book, *Pax Avalon*, glossy, well-drawn, sarcastic, and funny, is also a thoughtful meditation on the meaning of peace. The central character, Pax (Latin for "peace"), has powers of healing which, like the sacrifice of Christ, only work by drawing wounds into herself, where they eventually pass away. And traditionally Mennonite values seem embedded in the story. *Gelassenheit*, letting go: "No money, no benefits," says Pax, "I need to be free of any...entanglements" (53). *Wehrlosigkeit*, defencelessness: "I believe that every person deserves a chance to live." "Even if it costs you your own life?" "Death is...different for us" (53). And a clever climactic plot twist involves a character named Gerhardt Reimer, appalled by his own past involvement in war.

It could be argued that the book's anti-elitism, so prevalent among youth in the west, is also traditionally Mennonite. From the first comic book frames, the mayor and his team are portrayed as cynical, media-savvy spin doctors. Pax works as a member of the Avalon City Special Operations Unit, a team of technologically empowered "superheroes" who use force in various ways to combat crime and terror, but her duty to protect "Richville" repels her: "I'm here to help people," she says, "but it feels more like an abuse of power to focus on the rich and famous" (21).

Along the way, *Pax Avalon* touches on issues of video games, abortion, intentional community, and especially respect for all life, not as a passive observer response but as a responsibility. Perhaps the interpolations of prayer and ethical debate interrupt the flow of the story, but they also, on the other hand, lie at the core of the narrative, of the very reason for the telling. How can peacemaking work in a world that is based on violence? Friesen has no easy answers. Pax's teammate, Badge, alleges that "She endangers lives when she refuses to stop someone by force" (65). "I admire your idealism," argues another character, "but compromises are necessary for accomplishing great things for our God" (69).

There's a final showdown between superheroine and villain, as is mandatory in comic book plots, but in *Pax Avalon*, the confrontation results in a debate on morality. The morality, in fact, of our daily lives: "We compare brands of flour and don't even stop to think that this was an interest payment from a poverty-stricken country – so they could purchase our weapons!" (84) And in the ultimate obligatory death scene, the two antagonists speak to the silence of God, to the mystery of why God will not intervene, use force, to prevent suffering. "If God won't make us live in peace," says Pax, "neither will I" (101).

The story ends tragically. Violence is used to stop what is perceived as a greater evil. Pax, however, walks away in the final comic book frame with a child in her arms. "Let's go, baby" (103). The End. But in Reece Friesen's book, the story never ends. *Pax Avalon* reflects the intertwining of evangelicalism with social justice, a trend not untypical in the younger western generation, and the book is a call to action. It's been alleged that today's youth, overwhelmed by the stresses of competitive society, are reluctant to engage in social issues. Perhaps this holds true for human nature in general. Friesen's comic book is a plea for community and engagement, which may be the same thing. And in a postword to the book, he writes that there will be a sequel to *Pax Avalon*, because nothing is ever finally resolved. Or rather, he says, not really a sequel, but consequences. *Pax Avalon* is available from House of James.

To the question: "How does your Mennonite background affect your comic book work?" Reece Friesen responds: My Anabaptist upbringing instilled a strong sense of peace ethics (gleaned from a particular focus of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount). This naturally brought me into continuous internal conflict when I read and enjoyed comic books – I loved these stories but could not embrace the things behind them in good conscience. It was frustrating at times, but it was exactly this conflict that led me into the work of sifting and discerning.

It is the work of the Church within the Kingdom of God to learn the language of the secular cultures around us and penetrate them with truth. I view what I do much the same way as Wycliffe Bible translators or someone who does cultural immersion for the purpose of communicating better. I guess it's a dream of mine that Christians of all ages would at least ask themselves whether they need to abandon their "difficult hobbies" in order to honour God, or whether they should enter the difficult work of redeeming it. There is tremendous potential for proclaiming the Kingdom of God if we are willing to release our culture of origin and step cautiously into the world around us. The trick is to be centred enough to be the influencer rather than the one who is influenced.

Profiles

Margaretha Klippenstein Enns: A Grandmother who loved her Career

by Lora Sawatsky

We knew her affectionately as Grandmother. She came complete with peppermint cookies and peppermint candy, her special chicken soup, family dinners for festive occasions. We knew her as someone with a sense of humour mingled with a healthy degree of sarcasm and fearlessness in voicing strong opinions. We all knew she possessed a solid work ethic, an equally solid determination to succeed, and of course she expected the rest of us to succeed as well. Preferably her granddaughters would become nurses or at the very least teachers, and her grandsons would carry the prefix of "Dr." Her husband knew her as Grethe. Women knew her as someone who could help them through labour and safely deliver their children. Husbands knew her as someone who took command at a time when they could only stand and wait.

Margaretha Klippenstein Enns' journey into midwifery began early in life, since her mother, Helena Wall Klippenstein, was also a midwife. Margaretha married Heinrich Enns in the village of Donskoye, but the couple left southern Russia to homestead in Petrovka, in the Slavgorod colony in southern Siberia. After giving birth to eight children, experiencing the death of her firstborn, and surviving typhoid fever, Margaretha requested her husband to allow her to follow the career God had chosen for her. The family moved to Blumenort and after the death of five month old Jacob, Margaretha left for the home of Anna and Frank Duerksen in Saratov to become an apprentice to Anna, who had completed her midwifery degree in Riga, and had worked under Dr. Tavonius in the Muntau hospital. The seven children and the running of the household Margaretha left to her older daughters, fourteen-year-old Margaret and thirteen-year-old Helen.

Grandmother began her practice as a midwife in Russia and continued

to practice in Yarrow when the Enns family settled there in 1929. Since the two older daughters were now working in Vancouver and would later be employed in Chilliwack, daughter Sara assisted with household chores. For the pioneers of Yarrow, Margaretha Klippenstein Enns was more than a midwife. She consulted with Chilliwack doctors, especially Drs. McCaffery, Moore and Patten. They left her with specific instructions and the necessary medical supplies when they were unable to make house calls. Margaretha's youngest son and daughter-in-law still treasure the medical bag embossed with the initials M. E. which their mother received from Chilliwack practitioners.

Margaretha's daughters knew they needed to take responsibility with the family when their mother was away or busy with patients. Often women came to the Enns home when giving birth. When this occurred at night, the children were awakened and sent across the street to sleep at the neighbours while a bed was set up in the Enns' living room. After Margaretha and Heinrich built a new and larger house, the guest room doubled as a birthing room. "Patients usually stayed for 10 days. When husbands argued persistently that their wives come home sooner because they were desperately needed, Grandmother stood her ground. Often their time here was the only respite from hard work that these women had. Until the 1940s Margaretha delivered many babies in Yarrow and was frequently called to the neighbouring village of Greendale. She was well accepted as a midwife because she had a large family of her own. She knew the pain of losing children and understood immigrants who struggled against poverty. In the early years, when people were too poor to pay, she never demanded payment. At times families sent foodstuffs, including

fresh fruits and vegetables, in lieu of money" (Epp et al. 25).



Although there were other practising midwives in Russia and later in Yarrow, and the midwifery career was considered acceptable even if women had families, Grandmother modelled a woman who considered a career apart from raising a family. She certainly depended on her daughters to run the household and take care of their siblings when her work took her away from family. She depended on her husband to understand her commitment to career.

Midwifery was her calling, and she followed that calling, a sacred commitment and service to the community in which she lived. Grandmother loved her work and learned what she could in the field of medicine. Some of her passion for medicine was passed on to later generations: her youngest son, two of her grandsons and at least one great grandson became medical doctors. In a time, however, when a community depended on her for medical help, Margaretha Klippenstein Enns rose to the calling with strength and single-minded determination.

Epp, Irma, Harms, Lillian, and Sawatsky, Lora. "Midwifery: A Ministry," Village of Unsettled Yearnings. Victoria: Horsdal & Schubert, 2002.

Preserving the Good

by Heather Pauls Murray



With metal prongs, I hold my breath and lift a jar of peaches out of the boiling canner, delicately adding it to the rows of mason jars on the kitchen table. When it clinks against another, I can feel and hear that it will seal well. My face and neck are damp with steam, and I'm satisfied with my work but terrified of getting burned.

As the summer passes, I will can everything from cherries and peaches, to pears and, my favourite, pickled watermelon. Preserving seasonal fruit is one of the best things my grandmother and mother taught me.

I'm 26 and I live in an apartment in Vancouver. Yarrow expats in their 60s tell me that when they went to university, they were looked down on for being farm kids. In my generation, it's all the rage. Canning is retro. It's funny to think that my grandma's own everyday lifestyle – growing her own food, eating what's in season, composting, planting flowers for pollinators, raising chickens, not to mention sewing and knitting – is considered cool. The fact that I'm Mennonite and grew up on a farm is my never-fail party conversation-starter. I make instant friends.

"You grew up on a farm?" they ask, mouth hanging open. "I've never met anyone who grew up on a farm! I'm so jealous!" Their eyes sparkle imagining my dad on a red tractor in overall jeans with a strand of grass sticking out of his mouth. They see me with two tin milk pails attached to a yoke slung over my shoulders, or perhaps artfully scattering grain in an apple orchard full of cooing chickens.

They're thinking of a utopia where the food doesn't come from massive farms in Mexico in over-used soil. I doubt they're thinking of all the work that goes into growing your own food. They are imagining an alternative to produce that is genetically modified to travel long distances without rotting. What it gains in resiliency it loses in nutrition, flavour and texture. If you've bought a beefsteak tomato in January you know what I mean.

Farmer's markets are springing up everywhere with produce from all over the lower mainland. I can buy salad from a guy I went to high school with, and ten different kinds of full-flavoured tomatoes from my third cousins from the Okanagan. I would take a B.C. strawberry over the woody ones from California any day. My fridge is stocked with local produce.

Not only are people buying local food, they're also growing it themselves. Heirloom seed companies are seeing their sales double. Community gardens, collections of small plots you can rent, have waiting lists in the hundreds.

There are many reasons why I think this food movement is a blessing. It supports local farmers rather than industries far away. The food is fresher and more nutritious because the farms are smaller scale and can steward the soil well. Being mindful of where your food comes from is a way to live simply, take time to savour good food, celebrate meals with friends, and slow down. There's something spiritually fulfilling about digging your hands deep into rich, dark soil and trying to make something grow. Somehow, seeing a row of peas emerge from the soil feels redemptive.

I'm lucky to have my little 6 by 12 foot patch of dirt at the community garden where I'm currently growing a long list of favourites: parsnips, garlic, beans, peas, dill, summer savory, onions, strawberries, and more of the usual suspects. I'll admit that my fruits and veggies are double the size of everyone else's and I don't know why. Something subconscious must have rubbed off from grandma.

Mädchenheim Thesis needs participants

Sandra Borger, a Master's student at Simon Fraser University, is writing her thesis on "the constructions of gender, identity and ethnicity in young Mennonite women" who worked in Vancouver. Many of these young women lived in places like the *Mädchenheim* (home for young women). Borger's research is "based on oral interviews both with women that worked in Vancouver, and their families that remember their stories." Those who would like to participate in this research can contact Ms. Borger at 604-944-2068 or by email at smb11@sfu.ca. An article by Sandra Borger on the *Mädchenheim* will appear in the next newsletter.

Special Report: Paraguay and the Mennonites

Official name: The Republic of Paraguay

Official language: Spanish, Guaraní

Area: 406,700 km²

Capital: Asunción

Population: 6,830,000

According to Mennonite World Conference, there are 32,000 baptized Mennonites in Paraguay. They belong to 21 different national conferences, eight of which are members of MWC.

Of these Mennonites, only 49% are of Germanic origin, while 32% are Indigenous, and 19% Latino.¹



Paraguayan Journal

by Johann J. Janzen, translated by his daughter Hilda Janzen Goertzen.



**Peter Loewen and Hans Janzen
in Harbin, China.**

On December 17, 1930, at the age of 19, Johann Janzen and three of his friends escaped by foot from Russia across the Amur River into China. After two years they left Harbin, China, for Paraguay as part of a larger group of refugees, on a journey that would take two and a half months.

Once we arrived in Buenos Aires, we were immediately transferred onto the river steamer "Roma" to Paraguay. We were without money, and could not even buy a dozen oranges along the way. We came closer and closer to Paraguay. Along the way, we heard numerous stories about the jigger fleas and the mosquitoes in Paraguay. We still had not felt any mosquitoes, so I thought it could not be all that bad.

On approximately the first of May we arrived at Puerto Casado. This is where the "glorious" life began. We had not bathed in thirty-five days, so the first thing we did after getting off the boat, was to take a bath in the river. We were immediately told to quickly get out. "It's dangerous to bathe in the river because

of the big fish!" "Well," I thought, "at the most, crocodiles. After all, what could the fish do?"

We got ourselves fishing gear and went fishing. When the first fish bit, I pulled on the line and the fish was gone! Then my rod was gone! We then fastened the other rod securely and when the second fish bit, it could not get away. Der Kerl hatte Zähne wie eine Katze! (the fellow had teeth like a cat). His teeth worked on the line like a file. We made a small fire and fried the [piranha] fish. We were so hungry we could hardly wait to eat it.

We received eight galletas (soda crackers) for night. They were so hard that we could not even bite into them. I laid mine in the coffee pot and poured hot coffee over them, but they did not soften quickly. I was too tired to wait around for the galletas to soften, so I hung the kettle above my head, lay down and fell asleep. Nearby lay P. Reimer.

Suddenly, in the middle of the night, Reimer [woke me up and] fearfully said to me, "Imagine that! Just now a wobbly water frog jumped on my face, but I tossed him with all my strength into the next corner!" We lay there for a while and talked about the vermin in Paraguay. Then another frog splashed about! We put the light on and saw to our amazement that they were the galletas that I had put into the coffee pot. They had in the meantime expanded and welled

¹ Percentages from "What about the non-German Mennonites?" by Scott Bergen. *Canadian Mennonite*, Vol. 13, No. 16. Online version found at <http://www.canadianmennonite.org/vol13-2009/13-16/feature.php>

over the kettle. Because the six galletas had expanded greatly, we were able to make a meal out of them. We were able to satisfy our hunger and thus we slept the sleep of the righteous.

The next morning, we went to see the waters of the Paraguay River, the virgin forest and the unbelievable variety of animals. The first things we saw were the many vultures sitting on gnarly trees. Some were flying around while others were eating the leftover carcasses of butchered cattle. We also saw swarms of parrots and various species of wild doves. The contorted trees and bushes, meadows and the bitter grass, is what they called the jungle. All this we had observed in just five minutes. There were also half-breed Indians among the Indians. The Europeans were responsible for the half whites among them.

We spent another four days in this pathetic situation. If we were not able to eat ourselves full now, and if life was already so pitiful, how would it go for us in the colony?

Finally the train that was to bring us to Kilometer 145 was assembled. The train went on narrow gauge tracks. Now and then along the way we saw iron buildings, which Mr. Casado used to take the Palo Santo (holy wood) out of the bush for his barrel factory. The train would make stops to load things like plows, harrows, wagons, sheets of metal and other things. After a while, we finally would be on our way again. How fast did we go? Five kilometres per hour! Nevertheless, we did make progress. Of course, we only had a couple of hard galletas, but we were happy that we at least had received them! We had not seen money [to buy food with] in a long time. We did not want the wine because it was so rancid. It all struck us so amusing that we had to bend over with laughter like little boys.

Because the train went so slowly, we would jump off the train and run a stretch by foot, or climb around on top of the train car. Suddenly, the train stopped. Had the fire gone out, or was the train in need of repair? Then, to our amusement, the conductor came to tell us that this kind of behaviour was not acceptable while travelling at such a high speed. With much patience, on the conductor's part, we came to the agreement that we would only walk beside the train. We got into the train and travelled on.

Finally, after a fourteen hour drive we arrived at Kilometer 145. Here we saw strange looking people. Who were these people? Were they half Indians? Yet they spoke Low German. It was nine o'clock in the morning and the weather was somewhat cool. One person wore a shabby straw hat, an old fur coat and yet he was barefoot. The other person wore a pair of felt boots, a felt hat and a thin shirt. It also looked like the people were burnt brown by the sun. Peculiar people, they spoke our dialect, but with a North American accent. We found out that they were Canadians, who had emigrated around 1870 from Russia to Canada. This caused us to stop laughing. We talked to a girl that was working there, and she told us that in the colony they ate beans without any fat, twenty-one times a week. The beans were cooked in water to which a little salt was added, and then the meal was ready for the whole day. "Well," I said, "that is not so bad. I enjoy eating beans."

I spoke to various people regarding how they felt about living in Paraguay. The one person I talked to was content. He praised the land and the life they had. He was to be envied. Some others that I talked to didn't have anything to complain about either.

Johann (Hans) Janzen died in Buenos Aires, Argentina, from a stroke at the age of 44. Peter Loewen, (left in photo) who resides at the Taber Home, in Abbotsford, BC, celebrated his 100th birthday this year.

Between worlds: Growing up in Paraguay and Canada

by Helen Rose Pauls

Both sides of Viola Wall's family were among the first group to go to the Chaco's *Green Hell*, leaving Manitoba in 1927 to escape Canadian assimilation. While waiting in Paraguay for land to be measured and divided, many immigrants contracted typhus and over 100 died, causing some to return to Canada.

Not so Viola's ancestors. On her maternal side was great grandfather Martin Friesen, spiritual leader in Canada and Paraguay, who was relatively progressive, promoting choirs and education in the 1950s.

On her father's side is Peter J. Giesbrecht, teacher and preacher, who had 12 children, Jacob being her father. Jacob was one of the first to attend Bible School in Filadelfia in 1960 and he and his wife became missionaries to the Lengua Indians, learning the aboriginal language.

Great Grandpa Giesbrecht had been nocturnal and a wanderer, probably bi-polar, says Viola, and earned the nickname *Fuchs Giesbrecht*. Forever after, her family line has been the *Fox Giesbrechts*. A few years ago, when all the

Giesbrechts went to a retreat for a family gathering, a villager remarked, "You can let out the chickens for all the foxes are gone."



Jacob Giesbrecht and his children

Menno Colony to go to school and spent time with her two teenage aunts and a Down's syndrome uncle. She returned home only twice in the school year, once catching a ride with missionaries, and once on her father's motor cycle, which slipped and slid in the sand.

The next year the family moved to Tres Palmas in East Paraguay where a revival had occurred in the Bergthal colony. Her dad worked in a store to save money to go to attend Steinbach Bible School. EMC helped support the family during their time in Canada. Suddenly Viola experienced running water, flush toilets, wall to wall carpets, and a public school with mean and badly behaved children. Viola found that the hardest and fainted one day from stress.

Later, her father attended the Mennonite Brethren Bible College and attained a Bachelor of Religious Education degree, one of the first Paraguayan Mennonites to do so.

Viola's parents returned to the colonies, and settled in the Indian Mission *La Esperanza*. Once again the three older children lived with relatives in Menno Colony to go to school. Times were changing and modern ways were creeping in, causing some tensions. Viola, who was quite assertive and wore pants, remembers her brother's teacher telling him that Viola would go to hell for dressing like a boy. Her brother was very concerned until Viola's teacher set the old-fashioned one straight.

Viola's mother found it too hard to be bereft of her children, so her parents soon moved into town at Loma Plata where her father taught Bible school and the children became involved in youth choirs and programs. In the school holidays at the age of thirteen, Viola stayed home alone to care for the house and garden, to bake bread and cook the evening meal for the rest of the family who went cotton picking nearby, and for her uncle who worked in town. At Christmas time, she worked in the village store where she had to memorize prices and fill people's lists. One day a shipment of raisins came in for Christmas baking and Viola quoted the wrong price, one much lower than normal. The line ups to buy raisins were out the door until the error was discovered.

"Being 'Canadian girls,' we seemed to have an edge and the boys really liked us," says Viola. When she was fifteen, Viola got baptised and so did her boyfriend. A rumour swirled through the community that they were engaged to be married soon, as baptism and marriage often went hand in hand.

After grade nine, the family moved to Manitoba once again so her father could attend Otterbourne Seminary. Viola made good Christian friends and the English language came back to her, but she left her boyfriend behind. After two years, she went to live with friends in Paraguay on her own, thinking she could graduate there. What a disappointment when they insisted she repeat grades 10 and 11. By this time, she and her boyfriend had become estranged and they broke up and Viola returned to Canada for grade twelve. When her parents returned to Paraguay, she remained and attended Steinbach Bible School, achieving a Bachelor of Religious Studies with a Missions major. Specializing in linguistics, she got straight A's, even in Greek. Summers, she worked at Granny's Poultry and swam in gravel pits. After graduation, she

Viola was born in 1963, and remembers living close to the Indian families on the Mission Station. Here she learned some of the Lengua language. Missionaries from Canada joined them, as well as missionaries from Menno Colony and Fernheim, Paraguay. Members of the Mission Board and many visitors passed through. Viola was exposed to different cultures and had friends from afar. As second of four children, she remembers a carefree life, but had few other children to play with, as the Indian children had serious health and hygiene problems including tuberculosis, and hookworms from running around barefoot in villages without latrines.

Besides the relentless work of gardening and food getting, Viola remembers Sunday hikes with father and learning to swim in the water of murky dug-outs. Her family had modern conveniences like an indoor wood stove and kerosene fridge, and shared chickens and cows with others on the Mission Station. The Indians taught the Mennonites how to raise cotton; co-op fields were open to all.

At the age of seven, Viola moved in with her grandparents in



The Giesbrecht family

had numerous adventures including a summer as chamber maid in Banff, a summer with the Janz Team in Europe, and singing in a youth group, "Children of Light." While in Eastern Europe, Viola's Paraguayan passport caused her problems, since Paraguay was known as an anti-Communist country.



Young Legua women taking Home Economics classes

children, which youth had taken these courses.

But a more pleasant future waited when she met a farmer, Vic Wall, from Filadelfia. They married in July 1990 and farmed in Ribera, a new settlement sixty kilometres from Filadelfia, where Vic also became the spiritual leader in the house church. Viola led the choir with her guitar, organised DVBS, and was the women's leader. Soon she learned to care for the medical needs of the native farm workers, giving them their TB shots and making sure they took their medicine. She helped deliver babies and saw many women off to the hospital for maternity care.

Viola helped in the settlement school with music and singing and once did a 2 month term as a teacher to missionary kids in East Paraguay, because the need was there. Finally, after many hard years tilling virgin soil in an unpredictable climate, they became financially stable.

Vic had spent two years in Vancouver as a young man and both felt a pull to beautiful British Columbia where the children would have more opportunities. In 2003, they moved to Abbotsford and now attend King Road MB Church where Vic has relatives. Vic found work at *Columbia Kitchen Cabinets* and Viola is at home with four children and has a therapeutic massage business there. She leads singing and is on the church's Missions committee. In her spare time, Viola organizes the German radio program on KARI radio *Botschaft des Friedens* on Saturday nights.

Viola is on the committee that is planning our annual banquet planned for October 17.

Kinderwerk

by Robert Martens

As they pass around the maté, Hedwig and Uwe Stahl are teaching me Paraguayan manners. I draw a sip from the spout, "Thank you," I say. A few minutes later, Hedwig interjects, "Doesn't Robert want anymore?" "No," says Uwe, and I notice a twinkle in his eyes, "I don't think he likes it very much." "But I do," I say, "It's delicious." "Well," replies Uwe, "you said thank you, and in Paraguay you only say thank you when you're done passing around the maté, and you don't want anymore."²

Although the Stahls have lived in Canada for decades, they still have one foot planted in South America. Their parents were a part of the late stream of Mennonites that fled the Soviet Union in 1929 before Stalin slammed shut the doors to emigration. Canada was generally no longer an option, and these refugees gathered in Germany before most settled in the "Green Hell" of Paraguay. Many died of typhus and smallpox, pioneering a semi-arid land that seemed hostile to farming. In the end, however, their northern European work ethic won out, and Mennonites eventually achieved prosperity. Uwe and Hedwig were born in Paraguay and married there in 1966, with Uwe making a living as an electrician. But Uwe suffered greatly from asthma, and after being advised by his doctor to leave the country for the sake of his health, the Stahls moved to

² Maté, an immensely popular beverage in Paraguay, is made by steeping dry leaves of the yerba maté plant. It has a taste somewhat similar to a bitter green tea, and like coffee, contains caffeine. Usually it is drunk from a metal gourd with a spout (or *bombilla*), and is exchanged between individuals. Maté drunk cold is called *tereré*.

Hamburg, West Germany in 1969. It was to be a brief stay. Hedwig's parents³ had already emigrated to Canada in that same year, and now invited Uwe and Hedwig to join them there. (Uwe's parents would arrive in Canada in 1973.) And so it happened that the Stahls came to live in Abbotsford, where Uwe set up shop as an electrical contractor by forming Stalco Electric, while Hedwig worked as his secretary once their three sons were in high school.



Indian family waits at clinic. H. Pauls photo

The Stahls, however, remain passionate about their Paraguayan homeland. For six months of the year they live in the Chaco, assisting in a project called *Kinderwerk Filadelfia* (KWF, Children's Project Filadelfia), which they have been instrumental in setting up. The other six months they reside in Canada where, besides spending time with grandchildren, the Stahls do fundraising for *Kinderwerk*. KWF consists of three projects. The first, a Filadelfia daycare centre which ran into financial problems, was taken over in 1998 by the Stahls, who fundraised and constructed a new building. The daycare is open to children from 6 months to 6 years and has a clientele of various ethnic groups. Many who take advantage of this service are single mothers or the working poor. As Uwe says, without this service "these kids would be on the streets." The second KWF effort is a school in Filadelfia for hearing-impaired children of all ages, and is also a "rainbow project," a place of welcome for all races and ethnic groups.

The third project, a school 70 kilometres north of Filadelfia, was started by a German rancher who encountered economic difficulties and was obligated to look for partners in the project. Again the Stahls fundraised in order to continue the effort. The school, named *Arco Iris* (rainbow) by Wilmar, Uwe's brother, caters mostly to children of ranch workers, the majority Paraguayan, but there are also Brazilian students and indigenous children of various Indian tribes, such as the Lengua and Chulupí. Education is free, but those children who come from a distance and must board at *Arco Iris* are charged for their meals. Children of single mothers generally do not pay anything; the school serves, says Uwe, "the bottom class that have nothing." The teachers are all local Paraguayan Christians. They are paid a minimum wage by government, a rare injection of state funds into KWF which is topped up with a second minimum wage paid through the Stahls.

Why Paraguay? And why so much time and effort invested in charitable activity? "We were always talking about doing mission work," says Hedwig, and "the kids were asking why we weren't doing this." Then a fax arrived, asking for the Stahls' support for the failing daycare project. "We thought this was our mission," says Hedwig, "and Paraguay gave so much to our parents, we needed to give something back." "We know Paraguay," Uwe remarks, "the area, the language, and there are lots of poor people there.... I've always thought that half of life," he continues, "should be for God. I worked 40 years as an electrician, and the next 20 I'd like to be for God." The Stahls' Mennonite background has also been a stimulus. "We are of a generation," says Uwe, "who heard how our parents were helped by MCC, and this is an encouragement to help.... Mennonite history has formed our lives."

The needs in Paraguay are great. "I'm afraid of the gap between rich and poor," says Uwe. Native people are pouring into Mennonite-settled areas, hoping for work, but many remain unemployed. And the Stahls are concerned about what may be an anti-Mennonite bias by Paraguay's President Lugo. Fundraising for KWF is an ongoing enterprise. The Paraguayan Mennonite colonies are generally prospering, and a *Stiftung* (foundation) has been set up there to fund KWF. The majority of donations, however, originate in Canada. Initially the Stahls used their own money to support the projects, but then a friend suggested fundraisers. These started slowly, but have built over the years to the point where the annual KWF fundraising services, held each year in the Stahls' home church, Eben-Ezer Mennonite in Abbotsford, have been sold out.

"Our hearts are in the projects," Uwe affirms. These efforts, says Hedwig, "are not for a short time, but for a lifetime." Donations are always welcome, and needed. If a donor is reluctant, the Stahls point out, to fund the organization in general, it is possible to support a particular child, an abused girl, perhaps, an orphan, or a child with unaffordable medical requirements. "Mennonites are doing good," says Uwe, "but you should help till it hurts."

A video describing the work of KWF is available at the Archives of the Mennonite Historical Society in Abbotsford.

Uwe and Hedwig Stahl, interview, Abbotsford, Aug. 23, 2008.

³ Hedwig's father served for some years with the Union Gospel Mission in Vancouver.

An Experience in Interethnic Cooperation: the Perspective of the German-Mennonites

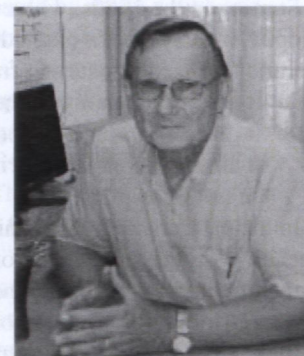
by Wilmar Stahl

1. German-Mennonite Immigrants in the Chaco

The presence in the Paraguayan Chaco of German settlers of Mennonite faith dates back to 1927, with two more migrations in 1930 and 1947. The settlers were of Dutch-Prussian-Russian ethnic heritage, and represented a strong agricultural tradition and a German cultural orientation. Persecuted for their religious beliefs and cultural traditionalism, they had come to buy large tracts of land in the Chaco, hoping to develop a peaceful and prosperous living here. These hopes weren't easily fulfilled, since the Chaco represents a rather harsh climate, inhospitable to European farming methods. Besides, in the political arena, a war was about to erupt between Paraguay and Bolivia.

Another challenge to peaceful living was the presence of an indigenous nation living on the lands that had been sold as "uninhabited." It became urgent to build a neighbourly relationship of reciprocity with the original owners of the Chaco.

Many of the approximately 8000 immigrants did not make it in the Chaco, and eventually emigrated elsewhere. Those who stayed grew to a current population of 14,000. During the same time, the 1000 native Enhlet, who had inhabited this region, have grown to 7000. Additionally, another 20,000 aboriginals from other regions of the Chaco have been attracted to the Central Chaco to share the living there.



Wilmar Stahl

Photo: www.mbconf.ca/home

2. The German-Indian Encounter

In the encounter of German immigrants and Chaco natives, people with diagonally opposed cultures met:

- The one with a production economy based on saving up reserves, the other with an economy based on acquisition and distribution.
- For one, the environment needed to be conquered and put to human domain; the other believed in a submission to nature, respecting taboos that prohibited any alteration of the environment.
- One valued an optimal economic independence of the individual; the other assumed values of optimal economic interdependence.
- For one, a person is born as a piece of soft clay that needs to be formed by family and society; for the other, a person is a seed that has its predetermined qualities, that make the person become what he/she already is.
- In one culture, the individual who knows and possesses can exercise authority over those who are not so knowledgeable; in the other, all are equals among equals, and no one can obligate anyone else to do something that does not fit the individual's innermost harmony.

From this cross-cultural perspective, the interaction of the groups under discussion surely must have been quite a challenge. Nonetheless, necessity, time, and faith were elements that, over the years, facilitated intercultural communication. And the result was a missions work and a relationship of social cooperation that were unique: the sending church was living fully exposed to the target group. This meant that the lived gospel was speaking louder than the gospel preached with words!

3. The Search for a Fraternal Relationship

In the beginning years, the social ministries were, to a large extent, motivated by compassion for those "who presumably were suffering needs of starvation and illnesses." The resulting relationship between German Mennonites and their native neighbours was therefore oriented towards charity thinking. Help was executed *for* the natives; economic activities were programmed *for* them, health services were delivered *to* them, and education was provided *for* them.

In a later period, in tune with international thinking, the emphasis of the socio-economic programs changed to a strict development endeavour. In this line, ASCIM (Asociación de Servicios de Cooperación Indígena-Menonita; Association for Indigenous/Mennonite Cooperative Services) was founded with the goal of making large investments over a short time. Programs followed the German thinking of covering all community needs at once, in order to attain social and economic independence as soon as possible.

It was from feedback received from native Christians that Mennonite Christians recognized and corrected their mistaken assumptions. The indigenous brethren had made it clear that they interpreted biblical solidarity as a continuous relationship of interdependence and ongoing communication. The dialogue over this issue had led to one conclusion: there was a need to

move from paternalism to fraternalism. But the question remained – what model of cooperation could lead the way to this goal?

4. A Model of Interethnic Partnership

Starting in the 1980s, with evangelical motivation and anthropological advice, German and Indian Mennonites developed, step by step, a methodology of interethnic community work, a partnership which became known as “associative cooperation.” Besides fostering fraternal relationships, the model aims at catering to the following values:

- It assumes equality of the partners in expressing expectations and offering possible contributions.
- It gives opportunity to both partners to contribute according to their gifts and resources.
- It aims at an utmost clarification of the circumstances of cooperation, emphasizing the openness and transparency of cultural positions.

In the partnership relationship, both partners come to agree to cooperate on a given project. This can be the construction of a health post; the supervision of a school program; technical assistance of a cattle breeding credit program; the joint administration of a health insurance fund; the organization of a community seminar; the intermediation of a package of scholarships for ongoing education, etc.

In the case that this kind of partnership takes place between ASCIM and a native community, it is understood that *the initiative of the project remains with the native community*. She will have to define the goal of the cooperation. To her also belongs the largest part of the responsibility for execution, and the contribution of a considerable portion of the resources.

ASCIM works alongside the community as a cooperating partner. She demonstrates her willingness to participate with resources, services and advice, always in accordance with the *objectives set forth in her bylaws*. In practice this means that not all goals presented by a native community will fit into the framework of possible ASCIM cooperation.

Here the challenge for ASCIM as a partner is to expose transparently what she can and cannot do, so the native communities will understand in which areas of their self-defined development plans they can invite the cooperation of ASCIM as partner. This demands that ASCIM self-expose her identity; but the native community also exposes her identity when she presents her planned initiatives for dialogue. If this dialogue takes place in a *climate of mutual acceptance*, a fraternal partnership can result.

In such a context, multiple lines of cooperation can function simultaneously. Partnership, then, happens every time the native community and ASCIM proceed from dialogue to planning process, and go on to actualizing a community project in a joint venture. The plan gives way to a written agreement, where details and commitments of both partners are specified. The agreement also serves as a guide for cooperation and as a basis for evaluation.

According to the ASCIM experience, interethnic partnership promotes a broad dialogue between partners, but as well within the community, which is in process of finding her “life project.” While discussing together a possible line of action, there is lots of opportunity for practising community planning and evaluation. It also fosters a discovery of talents and resources present in the community.

5. Experiencing Joys and Sorrows

The German Mennonites of the Chaco, when reflecting on their experiences of interethnic cooperation, are quite aware of not having reached the highest goal of a relational ministry. But they experience satisfaction for what has grown with the help of God.

It is rewarding to observe the autonomous work of the native churches, and how they bring to bear their faith on issues of community development. From the various community seminars, it has become apparent that their “life project” shows marked differences from the aspirations of non-Christian communities. Also, community statutes can include norms with biblical foundations.

It is encouraging to see how these indigenous communities have found a new economic harmony by substituting new and effective livelihood strategies for lost traditional cultural activities. A diversification of economic activities is being worked for, but guided by the ancient custom of sharing within the extended family; this custom achieves a feeling of security for natives.

It is further satisfying that dialogue is the preferred mechanism of solving and preventing conflicts between the different ethnic groups in the Central Chaco. This is possible through the living testimony of Christians of all ethnic groups, who claim to be obedient to the teachings of their Master, Jesus Christ.

At the same time, there are plenty of situations that are worrying to a participant in the scene who is willing to evaluate it in a serious way:

The relational ministry has not reached the stage where the German and Indian Mennonites practise a significant spiritual interchange. For one thing, there is the language barrier. But possibilities open up as graduates from Bible institutes increase in number, and the different groups start a journey of sharing and learning from each other.

Another serious challenge is in the low economic viability of agricultural production in the Chaco, especially for small farming. The climate related risks are very high. The native communities, following their own model for risk reduction, look for solutions by complementing their income in the labour market. But since population growth is high, the regional economy has not been able to keep up with the demand for jobs.



Indian family at Yalve Sanga, where Wilmar Stahl works. R Martens photograph.

supports native communities in securing land, resettling in agricultural villages, building infrastructure and social services, and assisting in eventually making a transition from a hunting-gathering economy into one based on agrarian production.

Wilmar lives today in Filadelfia. He and his wife Kaethe Wiens are parents of three daughters. They are members of the local Mennonite church. In a recent book, Culturas en Interacción – una Antropología Viva en el Chaco Paraguayo (Cultures in Interaction – A Lived Anthropology in Paraguayan Chaco), Wilmar describes his anthropological insights gathered through 35 years of walking alongside his Chaco brothers and sisters.

And last, a concern shared by many native and German Christians: the impact of secular values of the surrounding society. There is consumption, there are vices of civilization, and an emerging influence of television. On top of it all, political propaganda creates social confusion with its misleading emphasis on “political claims” as a way out of underdevelopment. This conveys a message that solutions have to be looked for outside the communities, following the lead of some “political messiah,” rather than working toward autonomy and self-reliance.

Wilmar Stahl Unger was born 1946 in Paraguay as son of German-Mennonite immigrants from Russia. After finishing high school in Filadelfia, he studied anthropology in North America (Goshen College and Syracuse University). In 1973 he joined efforts with the Chaco-Mennonite endeavour to build a regional development program for native peoples of the area, a project that eventually was consolidated in the founding of ASCIM. This partnership program between Mennonite and eight different aboriginal Chaco nations

A German teacher to Paraguay

by Robert Martens



Erhard Schneider has spent a long lifetime building social, cultural and theological bridges. A slim, dignified man with a pronounced German accent, he welcomes me warmly into his townhome, apologizing for the lack of coffee, as he is in the process of moving. As we talk it is soon apparent that his personality, soft-spoken, articulate and receptive, suggests the mediation skills necessary for building bridges between differing points of view. Mennonites, on the other hand, have often drawn distinct boundaries around their church and culture, and yet Erhard, with a German evangelical background, has been accepted as one of their own. The story behind this mutual respect has its roots in Germany and flowers in the colonies of Paraguay.

Erhard was born in 1928 in Meissen, Saxony. His family background might provide a clue to the origins of his evangelical ecumenism. Erhard's father, an official in the German railway system, was an elder in the Lutheran Church but also a “lay preacher” in an international fellowship, *Entschiedener Christentum* (Christian Endeavour), which worked with the Lutheran organization but was independent of it. Erhard's quite prosperous and stable upbringing was interrupted when he was drafted as a fifteen-year-old boy soldier into Hitler's army. Taken by the British in Osnabrück on the German army's retreat from the

Rhine, he was interned for six months in a prisoner of war camp in Ostend, Belgium. “Food was minimal,” says Erhard, “but in general it was human.”

After the war he finished secondary school, then worked for a year in a Bielefeld hospital, “just to find work, be useful, have a piece of bread to eat.” At the age of 19 he attended Bible school, dreaming of going on to university and becoming a

dentist, engineer or architect. It was then that his father disclosed that, at Erhard's birth, he had "dedicated me as the oldest to be a full servant of the Lord." This revelation changed his life. Erhard switched to theological studies in Münster, then studied in Amsterdam, Heidelberg, and Berlin, achieving a Master's degree in Education. By 1949 he was both pastor of a Bavarian Lutheran church and director for *Studentenmission in Deutschland* (Student Mission in Germany). In Amsterdam he met a law student, Lous (Louisa) Esser, whose father had died in a Japanese prisoner of war camp, and they married in 1954.

Erhard Schneider's life then took another turn. Deeply spiritual, he was dissatisfied with the Lutheran practice of baptism, which was frequently nothing more, in his opinion, than a secular institutional ritual. "Baptism is a promise of the Holy Spirit," he remarks. "Finally the Church of Bavaria refused to ordain me," he adds, and he moved on to the Brethren Church (which had links with the English dispensationalist J.N. Darby), where "I was baptized upon my faith." In 1959 he was offered the position of religious educator in a vocational school in Koblenz. Here he also became an ordained pastor of the *Vereinigte Kirche* (United Church), which brought together Reformed and Lutherans under one roof, and he served here for seven years. It was during this time, in which Erhard's responsibilities covered a wide area of Germany, that he made his very first contact with a Mennonite, Peter von Niessen, a pastor from Neuland Colony in Paraguay.

The German government of the time was heavily involved in foreign aid. Niessen approached the authorities, pleading the need for an educational coordinator in the Paraguayan Mennonite colonies. "When the cultural department asked von Niessen if he could find someone, he recommended my name, because I had helped him become a teacher." Erhard began a steep learning curve: "I got to know better the Mennonite dogmatic, the Mennonite vision of baptism, and Mennonite history" – as well as the German Mennonite congregation in Neuwied. "I was invited to be a Mennonite pastor," he says, "but since I was an official of the German government I couldn't do this."

In 1968 the Schneiders answered the call and moved to Paraguay. The posting, including travel costs, holidays, and so on, was entirely paid for by the German authorities. Indeed, in contrast to the traditional Mennonite perspective, Erhard feels that there was a "good relationship with church and government," that the officially sanctioned church "gave me freedom to work," and that he was "in some ways a middleman between church and government." Still, the move to South America was initially a hard one. The Schneiders by this time had five children, and their first home in Fernheim lacked running water and a sewage system. The concept of an outhouse was a new one to children raised in Europe. Soon, however, the entire family felt very much at home. "When I started to preach there, all the doors opened, I was accepted as a member of the Christian family, we had an intimate relationship.... That made it easy for us to adapt to their school system."

Paraguayan Mennonites had already made some excellent beginnings. Primary school was taught in 100 percent German, but by the time students reached high school, they were confronted with 90 percent Spanish. Erhard's role was not essentially to develop the system but to integrate it, especially between the two colonies of Fernheim and Neuland. "I had to be careful to work in the background, answer when I was asked what to do." A local teacher, Peter Klassen, was the real driving force behind the educational system. Erhard was able to reinforce the schools by bringing in well-trained former colleagues from Europe with the full support of the German government. Due to the ingrown nature and practices of Paraguayan Mennonite colonies, the rate of individuals with disabilities was very high. At Erhard's request, German specialists in dealing with disabilities were soon working in colony schools.

Meanwhile, Erhard was usually asked to teach Education, and when the Paraguayan government requested some curriculum in Latin, he did that as well. His "famous subject," however, was the arts, German literature ranging from the Eddas to Goethe and Schiller to the moderns. As well, theatre was taught and received enthusiastically by colony Mennonites, "not only Christian plays, but as long as they had serious ideas." Visiting German inspectors and politicians were impressed by the quality of learning and the progress that had been made, and were known to engage in some ardent discussions with students on German literature.

The work went so well that the initial two year term extended into eight. Though he had few talents as a farmer, Erhard even did some cattle ranching, and the entire Schneider family by now felt more like Paraguayans than Europeans. A vocational college was developed in Filadelfia with extensive financial support from the German authorities. When that project was completed in 1976, the Schneiders felt their work in Paraguay was over. Besides, at about that time, the Christian Democrat government in Bonn, which had been so helpful, was turned out of office, and Willi Brandt's Social Democrats elected. The new ideology was radically different: "I couldn't interpret Mörike in a socialistic way," says Erhard. The Social Democrats also mistakenly suspected Paraguayan Mennonite schools of being Nazi-influenced, and funding dried up.

"To this very day I love my brothers and sisters from the Mennonite church," says Erhard. In leaving Paraguay, the Schneiders were again leaving home. Erhard, however, never abandoned his theological differences with his Mennonite friends. "The idea of baptism is completely different," he says, "but I understand it.... I have a different opinion on the peace idea, but I understand it." In the case of Mennonite self-defence against Makhno's bandits in post Russian Revolution Ukraine, "I would have taken up weapons against gangs and terrorism." Yet Erhard was always able to find common ground. "Menno wanted to bring spiritual-minded persons together"; there was "a focus on Jesus Christ"; and "we went to a Mennonite church because we wanted a clear teaching of the gospel."

The Schneiders moved to Vancouver, where Erhard served as pastor at St. Mark's Lutheran Church for six years. He did radio work, obtained a Ph.D. at Clayton University, and taught at an Indonesian seminary for ten years. In 1993 the Schneiders were back in White Rock, where Erhard was associate pastor of a Lutheran congregation. Then, in 2002, the

Schneiders moved to Abbotsford and attended King Road MB Church, where many members have Paraguayan roots. With so many former students and colleagues in the Abbotsford area, the Schneiders felt very much at home. Erhard preached at King Road MB and also led German-language Bible studies there, especially with couples from Menno Colony in Paraguay. The Schneiders were committed participants in their congregation, and yet they were not quite Mennonite. "We are more alliance minded," says Erhard, and adds, "We are one in Christ, but we have to respect their different knowledge." A bridge builder. When we look at a diamond, he says, "One person says 'I see blue', another says 'I see yellow', but all of them see the diamond."

(At the time of writing, the Schneiders are moving, due to health and other considerations, back to White Rock.)

Erhard Schneider, Interview.

Lothar von Seltmann, *Gottes Raben Fliegen Noch*. Wuppertal: Brockhaus Verlag, 2006.

Book Reviews: Paraguay

Ernst Bergen, as told to Phyllis Pellman Good. *Jumping into Empty Space*.

Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2008. Reviewed by Robert Martens.

"Ernst, remember that before you sat on the Finance Ministry, God sat there" (98) (remark to Ernst Bergen by an "ex-con friend, a murderer.")

When Nicanor Duarte Frutos, leader of Paraguay's Colorado, or "Red" Party, invited Ernst Bergen to be his Minister of Industry and Commerce, Bergen's astonished response was, "Mr. President, you are totally insane!" (48) Paraguayan Mennonites, traditionally suspicious of the world of power, were unaccustomed to participation in politics. "I had grown up believing that we should pray for our governing authorities. Period" (62). Bergen agonized over whether to accept Duarte's request; entering the corrupt realm of politics would be a leap of faith, a "jump into empty space." Ulterior motives were of course involved, as Duarte's party was interested in the extremely successful cooperative system developed by Mennonites, and Bergen might be a useful link. Besides, there were rumours of oil in the Chaco, where the oldest Mennonite colonies were located. Bergen, a prosperous entrepreneur and comfortable with his life, fiercely resisted Duarte's invitation. Eventually, however, he complied, becoming close friends with the President and presiding over four years of surplus and economic growth.



Ernst Bergen

photo: www.media.org

Despite the occasional awkwardness inherent in translation (interviews with Bergen involved Spanish, German, and English), Bergen's first-hand account of his foray into politics, *Jumping into Empty Space*, is irresistibly entertaining. The beginning of his story conforms to a traditionalist Mennonite pattern, with the adolescent's sowing of wild oats, followed by "conversion" and return to the fold. As a youth, Bergen was inclined neither to religion nor hard work, and his achievements in school were far from stellar. He was sensitive to his failures, however, and his parents eventually acceded to his request to be sent to a tightly-run technical school far from their home in Filadelfia. The experience would change his life. "It turned out to be fortunate that I was forced to identify and appreciate the Paraguayan culture at the age of 16. The drastic culture shock I was experiencing made me re-think my faith and relationship with God" (22). Bergen then "ventured into the big city of Asunción with very little preparation.... I was quite adventurous and not at all holy" (31).

In Paraguay's capital city, Bergen's natural leadership and business skills helped launch a prosperous career. At the same time, however, he was learning the *poder de contención*, the power of self-restraint, and resurrecting a tender conscience inherited from his parents. "I was beginning to comprehend that it's not the most important thing to be the richest guy in the graveyard" (35). Bergen decided that he would only invest ethically, that taxes must be paid honestly (somewhat unusual in Paraguay at the time), and especially that the ultimate goal of a commercial enterprise is not so much profit as the well-being of its employees. It was also in Asunción that Ernst married another natural leader, Lucy Giesbrecht.

Bergen's success was attracting attention. Duarte invited him to speak to a party gathering in 2002, and Bergen, intimidated and apprehensive, chose the topic of "The America Hero." He surprised his audience when he revealed that the "hero" was the gifted leader, Jesus, whose communication skills he compared to those of Ronald Reagan. These ideas, seemingly superficial, even absurd, would, however, serve him well in his forthcoming career. When Duarte in 2003 issued his invitation to enter politics at a high level, Bergen very reluctantly accepted, and only with the support and urging of his

family and church elders. Over the next years he managed to reduce tax evasion to the extent that, in one case, a businessman complained that it was costing him nearly as much to conduct his dealings in the black market as to act within the law. Reform in the desperately poor and corrupt country of Paraguay was not easy, but Bergen persisted with the help of a carefully chosen departmental team. And his ideas on Jesus begin to ring true. "He walked around the Sea of Galilee and looked for simple people with a high commitment to the cause. They didn't have to have a high level of knowledge, but they needed a high level of commitment to the vision" (80).

Bergen was living a conflicted existence. How does one exercise power without being seduced by it? From his mother he had learned the hard practicalities of life, the necessity of holding firm. These skills were demonstrated when Bergen, declaring that the government was financially frail, faced down a bitter, sometimes violent strike by civil servants. And from both parents, but especially, perhaps, from his father who found his greatest fulfillment in giving, Bergen had developed a great empathy for the miseries of the dispossessed. "All around me," he says, "I saw powerful people who had failed to handle power well.... I looked for someone who was in government now, or formerly, who could be a model for me. I couldn't find anyone" (126). He came to the conclusion that "power is never an end in itself.... God-given power is ultimately to help the needy" (127). Bergen's well-developed social conscience was evidenced in his struggle with global oil companies and their attempt to defeat an ethanol additive program which primarily benefited small farmers. He was also passionately involved in prison work, and made it a point to surround himself with people from the margins. "Their level of commitment is unusual, often far higher than the saints of the Lord and the well-prepared people.... My driver ... is a former prisoner" (90).

In 2005 Bergen moved into the position of Minister of Finance, and the ensuing stress of the job eventually helped precipitate his resignation in 2007. He now devotes himself to teaching his children a sense of community and to expending his entrepreneurial skills on social projects. The final chapter of *Jumping into Empty Space* is a personal summation of his life and career. Typically, Bergen's ideas sometimes sound nearly clichéd but are redeemed by and rooted in a practical social conscience. "I think a lot about my parents.... They are extremely happy people, although they have no earthly powers and very little money" (165). He frankly admits his failings: "I'd like to have more patience. I don't listen sufficiently to people" (167). He also articulates his conflicted feelings, an emotional battle, perhaps, between stubborn arrogance and passion for the poor. "In many cases, idealism is a problem for me. I don't know which I am – not idealistic enough, or too idealistic. Maybe I'm a frustrated idealist. My work in government rubbed hard against my idealism. Many times I couldn't accomplish what I wanted to" (168).

Bergen concludes that idealism itself may be a problem. "I'm less of an idealist now than I was earlier. I think it's a little like raising children. Now I don't know anything, when before we had kids, I had all the answers" (168). Still he remains immensely proud of his term in government, and, at the end of this engaging narrative, credits a solidly prophetic faith for his achievements. "When we began five years ago, we sometimes felt like we were jumping into empty space. Looking back now I can see that the empty space was never bigger than the hand of God which held us" (174).

Gerhard Ratzlaff, *One Body – Many Parts (Ein Leib – Viele Glieder)*.

Trans. Jake K. Balzer. Asunción, Paraguay: Evangelical Mennonite Association of Paraguay, 2008. Reviewed by Robert Martens.

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body – whether Jews or Greeks ... [dark-haired or blonde, Spanish- or German-speaking, conservative, traditional or progressive], and we were all given the one Spirit to drink (7, incorporating I Cor. 12:12).

For the past 500 years, the autonomy of individual Mennonite congregations has given rise to a culture of division, splitting and shunning, and on the other hand to healthy debate and cooperation. In his book, *One Body – Many Parts*, a history of the Mennonite church in Paraguay, Gerhard Ratzlaff argues strongly for tolerance and charity among the widely diverse factions of that community. "[W]ith respect to unity of *parts of one body*," he writes, "there is still something left to be desired" (7).

Paraguayan Mennonites, Ratzlaff contends, must awaken to the knowledge of their rich history, or the differences between the various churches may tear them apart. Theirs is a history of commitment of both leaders and of "many unnamed persons," who "have always had a decisive influence in building the kingdom of God" (8). He calls upon Mennonites to honour their past by focusing on personal responsibility: "Thus we will *make* history and not only endure it" (15). Ratzlaff's theory of history is an intriguing one. Like ancient Israel, he says, Mennonite faith has been shaped by the story of its wanderings. "Faith is not based on ideas and religious feelings, but on historical facts, and the church can celebrate this faith by referring to past history" (15). Ratzlaff's conceptions of history and faith constitute a rejection of individualistic postmodern theory, and it is difficult to say whether he is thinking in traditional religious terms, or proposing a new ideology based on integration. "The *objective of historiography* is the glorification of God, expansion of His Kingdom and service to

the neighbour" (17). Ratzlaff's bias, however, is clear: the Mennonite church must steer a course between exclusivist legalism and outright assimilation into mainstream society, and it can accomplish this through a service of love and respect.

Although, rather strangely, Paraguayan Mennonites identify with the Swiss wing of their tradition, their story is clearly rooted in the Lowlands/Russian migrations. In Prussia, Ratzlaff writes, Mennonites were marginalized by oppressive government legislation, and reacted by consolidating a strong, sometimes insular community. Their exclusivist predilections were reinforced in Russia, where the czars, who needed settlers for newly conquered territories, generously allowed an



Indigenous Mennonites sing at World Conference

Robert Martens photo

enormous degree of independence for Mennonite colonies. This, Ratzlaff declares, was disastrous. "A state church in miniature reminiscent of the Middle Ages had emerged" (46). Mennonites became so accustomed to this way of life that, upon immigration into Paraguay, they negotiated privileges for their new colonies based on their Russian experience. Insularity and arrogance have sometimes resulted. "Could there possibly be a reversal of the Russian process ... – a new metamorphosis? ..." (46)

One Body is hindered by a lack of indexing and by an occasional awkwardness in language due to the exigencies of translation. Its pages of data and listing of names and dates can also make for sometimes dry reading which, however, is broken by frequent fascinating storytelling. And the book is a good basic history of the Paraguayan Mennonite experience. In terms of strict national numbers, Paraguayan Mennonites, in comparison to other Mennonite communities, rank only ninth in the world, but within their own country "have almost

the strongest representation percentagewise" (20). Their diversity is astounding, not only within the traditional ethnic groupings, but also within the rapidly expanding Latin and Indian conferences. This has led to a confusion of identity and a debate as to what constitutes a Mennonite. "I am not a Mennonite," says a Latin Paraguayan student, "but I have accepted the Mennonite faith" (22).

Ratzlaff's history begins with what he categorizes as the "progressive" churches. The first Mennonites to arrive in Paraguay were Canadians fleeing what was perceived as intrusive government legislation. Menno Colony was established in 1926-27 under leadership that was entirely church-connected, but although it had traditionalist beginnings, it has evolved into a large, unified, and open-minded community. In 1930 Fernheim Colony was founded by Russian refugees. It faced a harsh climate, desperate poverty, difficulties with spiritual tepidness and lack of leadership, and was forced to endure the Chaco War of 1932-35. Even more damaging was the emigration in the late 1930s of one-third of Fernheim's population to the new Friesland Colony, one reason for the split being factional support for Hitler's national socialism. Over the years, however, both of these colonies have grown and prospered. Neuland and Volendam Colonies were established after World War II by Mennonites who had fled the Soviet Union with the retreating German army. A Mennonite church also developed in the capital city of Asunción; Ratzlaff argues that the young and mobile congregation there actually benefited from the urbanization and breakdown of the colonies.

The Paraguayan Mennonite Brethren faced many of the same difficulties: economic hardships, emigration to other countries, fragmentation, and an exclusivist attitude that sometimes resulted in excommunication and intolerance. The Brethren also have progressed beyond the narrowness of denominational creeds: "So a credible walk (*orthopraxis*) is stressed beside true doctrine (*orthodoxy*)" (116). The smaller Evangelical Mennonite Brethren and Evangelical Mennonite Conference have similarly evolved from insular beginnings.

"Traditionalist" Mennonites, Ratzlaff argues, have continued to struggle with formalism. Although Ratzlaff seems fascinated by the traditionalists and welcomes their generosity, he is unimpressed with their unwillingness to integrate with larger concerns: for example, education is limited to the age of 7 years for boys and 6 years for girls. The small groupings of "conservative" Paraguayan Mennonites, on the other hand, migrants from the Swiss wing in North America, are called by Ratzlaff "a hidden jewel in the variegated mosaic of Mennonites in Paraguay" (167).

And then there are the "non-ethnic" Mennonites, both Latin and aboriginal, who today far outnumber the Germanic church members. In what seems all too familiar, the Indian population was hunted down for sport and nearly driven extinct by war and epidemics. "The distress of the Indians represented a challenge for the Mennonites, which was recognized and taken seriously" (172). Ratzlaff's understanding of Indian customs and religion is somewhat condescending and limited, but he honours the Mennonite initiatives to place Indians in agricultural settlements based on Mennonite models. Finally Ratzlaff

outlines the astonishing growth of Spanish-speaking Mennonite churches, which are struggling to some extent with problems of identity.

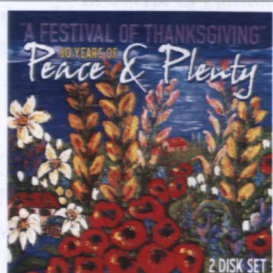
One Body traces, in its last pages, the development of the Paraguayan Mennonites from "a type of theocracy" (203) presided over by the KfK (Commission for Church Affairs), to an increasingly open and generous body of believers led by an outward-looking *Gemeindekomitee* (conference committee) and by the charitable outreach of Christian Services. The Paraguayan community has been plagued by an occasional reluctance to accept the peace position, and by a chronic shortage of volunteers to staff an array of social projects, but over the years much has been achieved. Besides numerous other ventures, a psychiatric hospital, a clinic for lepers, a seniors' home, a daycare, and a shelter for street children have been inaugurated by the Mennonite churches.

Loving activity on behalf of others, Ratzlaff writes, is what constitutes true Christianity and the best aspects of Mennonite tradition. In the rich history of "progressive" Paraguayan Mennonites, he discerns three distinct epochs: (1) 1927-1960: the pioneering years, with "the close interlocking of colony and church"; (2) 1960-1990: an era of consolidation and increasing prosperity, coinciding largely with a strongman government in Asunción; (3) and from 1990 on: a time of a growing, if slumbering, sense of responsibility for the wider world. This third era, Ratzlaff argues, demands a form of integration, not assimilation, with mainstream society. "In assimilation, the values of a culture and religion are given up in favour of another. In integration, the traditional forms are adapted to the natural culture without surrendering biblical values" (296). Many difficult choices result: "Are we compromising with the prevailing corruption in the business world and in politics or are we resolutely and consciously taking the road of righteousness and service?" (297) The key, Ratzlaff concludes in his fine book, is a life of service as depicted in a poem written by a Paraguayan Mennonite volunteer in a psychiatric hospital:

I want to impress upon my heart and mind
that I am not alone on earth,
But lovingly pass on to others
The love which is my life (252).

One Body – Many Parts is available for purchase at the Mennonite Historical Society Archives.

Gift Ideas



"60 Years of
Peace & Plenty"
2 CD set - \$15.00

Sixty Years of Peace & Plenty CD

As the narrator traces the path of the WW II Mennonite refugees from Ukraine to Germany and finally to Canada, stories and poems are interspersed with well loved hymns and folk songs. Experience the terror of a mother fearing that she and her children will be sent back to Russia; the fears of a very young Mennonite soldier on the battlefield; the joy of a mother in Siberia on reading a letter revealing that all three of her sons have survived the war. Laugh with Andreas Schroeder as he describes the panic that ensues when the Niebuhr family's rabbits mess up their "English" neighbour's newly seeded lawn – will this event send them back to Germany? These and other stories, poems and songs, told by children and grandchildren of the refugees, breathe life into an often forgotten time.

Readings by Andreas Schroeder, Steve Klassen, Connie Braun, Louise Bergen Price, Helen Lescheid, Robert Martens, Elsie K. Neufeld, and Rob van Dyck. Singing lead by Peter Goertzen; Soloist, Hilda Janzen Goertzen. Pianists: Jane Grunau and Ruth Derksen Siemens. Recorded at Emmanuel Mennonite and Sherbrooke Mennonite churches.

"I cried tears of sorrow and laughter. The songs were perfect as they were interspersed with the readings and it all just appealed to the senses. It is a history that cannot and should not be forgotten." (Marlene Friesen)

For family and friends interested in Mennonite history, consider a subscription to our newsletter, **Roots and Branches**. Published 3 times a year, **Roots and Branches** focuses on articles dealing with the history of British Columbia Mennonites as well as items of interest to the broader Mennonite community. In addition, the newsletter provides information upcoming special events, the Annual General Meeting, and on resources available at the archives. A donation of \$25 will cover the cost of a subscription. Tax receipts will be issued for all donations.

Blessed Hermitage (continued from page 24)

He attended the Mennonite Educational Institute, graduated from UBC and went on to further studies at Fuller Seminary where he met and married Alice Nikkel. After teaching a year at M.E.I., he moved to Germany for doctoral studies, much of this under the direction of renowned theologian Karl Barth.

Clarence Bauman returned to the US in 1961 and accepted a professorship at the Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana. It was there that Mabel and I first met him and Alice. I began my seminary studies in the fall of 1962. Clarence was my professor of Greek and Ethics. He was immersed in classical theology but had a special affinity for the mystical and contemplative. It was this bent in him that moved him to establish the hermitage that still captures the imagination of so many people. In a 1990 letter written to Mabel and me, Clarence speaks to this inner journey:

The hermitage is not a part of a housing project and therefore need not be occupied to fulfill its spiritual intention. Essentially the hermitage is a symbol of Divine Presence at the vital edge of our consciousness of time and space.

The hermitage is a mystery and a mystery should not be forced to reveal the inner secret lest its integrity be violated by being analyzed out of existence. The hermitage is a miracle, it is not our own doing, let alone our own possession, nor our own ego trip. It all just happened.

It is here that the will of God is discerned, that the shallow opinions of man are transcended and that the lost wasteland of the soul is recovered. We need to experience again the inner journey back to the heart of God. We need times of profound reflection on our relation to God, to others and to ourselves.

Why go to a hermitage? To experience the morning and evening of creation. To discern the nature of flowers, roots, berries, trees and the song of the birds. To understand the stars. To become still in mind and spirit. To reflect on the meaning of life. To achieve a balanced life-style between solitude and communion, poverty and charity, study and labour, and to recover the wholeness, sanity and dignity of being.



By the mid-eighties Parkinson's disease was having such a major impact on Clarence that he was not able to fulfil his cherished vision of completing Beit Shalom. His visits became less frequent. On one of the Baumans' last visits they stopped over for dinner and an evening of conversation with us and other friends. In his clear voice he chanted a table prayer. As we visited his condition was such that he had to stretch out on the floor, engaging all the while in a lively dialogue.

Clarence died in 1995, and the Hermitage has since been maintained by Camp Squeah. For a time in the late 1990s and into the 2000s there was some interest in re-establishing the Hermitage as a place of solitude and reflection for those who wished it. That dream has not yet materialized.

Still, many campers and visitors hike to the site to meditate, to take in the quietness of the Hermitage, or, as Clarence says, "to experience the hermitage, not as a building but as a place where one is in the divine presence." The Blessed Hermitage has become a heritage site and a destination for the pilgrim who wishes to "experience again the inner journey back to the heart of God."

The Blessed Hermitage Revisited

by Walter Paetkau, photos by Miles Bissky

In the fall of 2008 our house church, Abbotsford Mennonite Fellowship, spent a weekend at Camp Squeah, just north of Hope. On a Saturday afternoon a number of us went for a walk, stopping on the way at the "Blessed Hermitage," perched on the edge of a rock cliff. Having experienced the beginnings of the Hermitage in the 1970s, and being a friend of Clarence and Alice Bauman, the founders, I was able to give a brief account of its story.

During the years the Baumans spent time at the Hermitage, a notice was posted at the portal:



THIS BLESSED LITTLE HERMITAGE
IS DEDICATED TO THE GLORY OF
GOD
FOR THE DISCERNMENT OF HIS
WILL
THROUGH CONTEMPLATION AND
STUDY

Down from the portal along the pathway leading to the buildings meticulously built over the years were posted a variety of sayings on tree trunks, preparing one for silence and contemplation. The first building, backing into a rock wall, is the cedar-shingled carport used to store lumber and goods while construction was in progress. Next is the Hermitage itself, large enough for a small bedroom and kitchenette. It is built encompassing a large rock and is set against a towering tree that escapes through the roof line.

St. Michael's Hut, the study, overlooks the river valley below. Beit Shalom, "house of peace," a small A-frame building, is roofed in but was never completed. It was meant for a place of silent worship. An outhouse, complete with a half-moon on the door, is located along a rocky path behind the buildings. Water was siphoned down from the creek north of the hermitage. Propane was used for heating, and lamps for light. All goods were packed in.

Clarence and Alice spent many summers here and most of one year when he was working on his book, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Modern Quest for its Meaning*. My wife Mabel and I spent some Sunday afternoons and summer evenings there sitting around the fire, cups of tea in our hands, and talking. Many visitors had similar experiences. For the campers down below, the Baumans were the "hermits" but they were well received as part of Squeah's tradition.

Clarence grew up in the Fraser Valley in the 1930s and '40s. He worked hard with his pioneer parents in clearing land and establishing a farm. Clarence was a diligent participant in church. (Continued on page 23)

