Putting Away Childish Things

Jacob N. Driedger

Essex-Kent Mennonite Historical Association

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Introduction

When I look at my father's portrait (Part VI), I am reminded that I have only two memories of his Red Cross service in Moscow. The first is his mention of auditing some courses at the University of Moscow during relatively short periods of free time. The second is the purchase of a gold ring in the big Russian city, a ring he brought back via Gaychur to Camelot (Schoenfeld) for his intended, a wonderful lady who became my mother. (In Camelot the engagement ring also served as the wedding ring.)

No doubt I should have made inquiries about life in Moscow: the people, the memorable sites, the politics, but apparently I did not seem interested, and for men to keep a diary I presume was considered effeminate.

My children in future years will have a compendium of information about their father and will have no reason to decry the paucity of knowledge about him. In Deuteronomy, Israel is admonished to keep "these words" in their heart and to teach them diligently to their children. Admittedly I have referred to the biblical passage out of context, but the advice is nonetheless well taken: parents, tell your stories to your children.

Sometimes when my older siblings and I discuss an event from the past, we disagree on pertinent details about what actually occurred. For instance, we have salient disagreements on the Gunning tragedy that took place in Ruthven in the 1930s. I draw several conclusions from our different opinions. First, memory itself does not establish a happening as fact because memory fades away from what was said and what occurred. Secondly, there may be several truths in an event, not just one. Storytellers, like the makers of myth and legend, enjoy morphing all the lesser truths into one heaping verity. Thirdly, is memory really history, the way *Pelee Island, Then and Now*, is history? The preceding doubts notwithstanding, I have attempted to tell my story with honesty and integrity. Let others engage in telling tall tales.

In *There Was A Boy* I attempted to explain and critique life as I had observed and experienced it in the decade of the 1930s. In most of my narratives there was little room for controversy (although some insisted on it) because of my use of pseudonyms and a time frame that for most readers was a distant past. In *Putting Away Childish Things*, a reference to Paul's admonition to the Corinthians toward the end of the apostle's nearly three-year stay in Ephesus, I write about recollections of the 1940s, and so pseudonyms will no longer be tolerated because time has moved significantly forward. That presents a change with respect to the interpretation of certain events especially related to WWII. During the war I was in high school and so my participation consisted mainly in reacting

to Mennonite pacifist views and in watching Mennonite men of military age come to Dad's office, in fact, the living room in our house, to consult with him about matters relating to the war. (My Dad was pastor or sometimes referred to as the *Aeltester* of the Leamington United Mennonite Church on Oak Street from 1933-1958.) My greatest shock was to see a Mennonite young man dressed in military uniform come to Dad and plead, "Please get me out of the army. At heart I am a conscientious objector."

In writing about the war, I present various points of view including how my forebears in Ukraine came to grips with the issue of pacifism. I also include my non-Mennonite neighbour who went active and died overseas. I attempt to play no favourites; the reader will be obliged to form his/her own conclusions.

I left Leamington in the fall of 1943 to attend Niagara Christian Collegiate, graduating from grade thirteen in the spring of 1946. In the fall of 1946, I entered Bluffton University (Ohio), where I was bombarded by the John Dewey attitude to education; that is, progressive education, including learning by experience, not by rote. The Dewey invasion of Canada came later.

With respect to poetry, I have chosen selections that are understandable and hopefully entertaining for the most part. Unfortunately poetry generally does not have a good name in our society; nonetheless, perhaps sometime in the future I will call out some of the more obscure poems in my collection.

Finally, it is my hope that this account of my life will be of interest and significance not only to my own children but also to the general readership.

Age 79

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I thank Rev. Darrell Fast for perusing my essay "My Full Introduction to Protestant Fundamentalism."

I appreciate Dorothy Sherk's approval of my essay "My Favourite Teacher"; Johanna Dyck's for "Mr. George Dyck"; Lydia Wichert's for "Mr. Wichert."

With Rudy Rempel's consent I submitted "Hitch-hiking Home for the Holidays" for publication; similarly Alfred Willms' for "Cruising Down the River."

I am pleased that my Bluffton cohorts, Bob Amstutz and Winnifred Fett Schmucker, respectively, were delighted to make a written contribution toward my efforts. Similarly, Edward Penner as well as Johanna Dyck were willing to contribute to "And there were added…"; both deserve thanks.

I am especially grateful to my LDSS colleague, Bill Pollard, for his consent in my using an important quotation from *Leamington District Secondary School Centennial Celebration 1896-1996.*

This book would have been incomplete had I not been able to refer directly to T.D. Regehr's *Mennonites in Canada 1939-1970 A People Transformed.* He wrote that he was pleased to share his work with others. For that he merits our thanks. Similarly, Dr. Harvey L. Dyck waived copyright conditions so that I could refer directly to David G. Rempel's book *A Mennonite Family in Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union 1789-1929.* He too deserves recognition and thanks. My neighbour, Marilyn Whittle, let me use her farm dog as the subject for a poem.

Finally, I would like to express my appreciation to my wife, Margaret, and to my daughter, Paula, for their assistance in revising the manuscript. And then how can I fail to mention Astrid Koop, Mary Thiessen, Gisela Schartner, and Harold Thiessen on the editorial committee for making the book a reality!

PART I

PEACE, THE GIFT OF GOD'S LOVE

Dirk Willems here turns around to save his persecutor's life. Willems was then captured, imprisoned, and burned outside Asperen, A.D. 1569, by the papists.

Mennonites And Peace

In the following essay based on the notes of my father and T.D. Regehr's excellent book, *Mennonites in Canada 1939-1990* (University of Toronto Press 1996), I wish to clarify the Mennonite position on war and peace.

Mennonites are a body of Christians, who separated from the Roman Catholic Church at the beginning of the sixteenth century about the same time that the Church of England severed its ties with Rome. The Mennonite Church or the Anabaptist Movement, as it was then called, originated in Switzerland, the founder being a young patrician and scholar named Conrad Grebel. A number of other highly educated men were among the first supporters of the Mennonites. They insisted upon a new church of truly committed and practising believers in contradiction to the prevailing concept of the inclusive church to which by birth and infant baptism the entire population belonged. They demanded Christian nonresistance, the complete abandonment of the use of force and the taking of human life.

The early Mennonites derived their faith solely and directly from Scripture, which they studied diligently. They soon realized that peace was the will of God as found in such verses as:

> " and his name shall be called wonderful, counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting father, the prince of peace";
> "peace I leave with you, my peace I give you";
> "and on earth peace, good-will to all men" (and women);
> "seek peace and pursue it";
> "blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."

They also had the conviction that the Catholic Church itself had overtowered the essence of Christianity with outward formalism that lacked a worship of God in spirit and in truth.

Conrad Grebel and his followers in Switzerland took an energetic stand in living their convictions and this started a separate church. The date of 1525 is the birthday of the Mennonite Church.

But challenging the authority of the state church in religious matters was unheard of in those days, and so these dissenters were declared the enemy of the state, which resorted to suppression by the harshest of measures. A general search was made for the leaders, who were liquidated as soon as they were apprehended. Within two years the leading members of the new church in Switzerland had been executed; nevertheless, the church in Switzerland grew in numbers.

In 1530 the Mennonite faith first appeared in the Netherlands. As in Switzerland, severe persecution set in immediately. Between 1531-1597 about 1500 Mennonites were put to death in the Netherlands.

Almost all Mennonites know the archetypal story of one Dirk Willems, a sixteenth century Mennonite who ran across a frozen river when being pursued by his would-be captors. One of his pursuers also ran onto the ice but fell through. Willems turned around and rescued his oppressor, only to be seized and imprisoned. After enduring torture and kangaroo court proceedings he was burned at the stake.

The preceding story is the nutshell, the essence, of Mennonitism. It illustrates the risks of living in accordance with Jesus' teachings of love and nonresistance.

In 1530 a Catholic priest named Menno Simons (1496-1561) joined the new church and was baptized on confession of faith. He became the prominent leader of the Movement, and members of the new church became known as Mennonites. Menno's significance lies in the fact that he assumed the responsibilities of leadership at a crucial time and succeeded in winning large followings and creating new congregations. Many Mennonites today have his tome *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons* (Herald Press) in their libraries.

One result of the persecutions and oppressions of Mennonites was the emigration to other lands. From Switzerland many went to Pennsylvania, from where a large number came to Ontario after the American Revolution in 1776. Others went to Prussia (Poland), where they again experienced intolerance and unequal civil and religious liberties. Meanwhile, a favourable development took place in Russia. The Russian Empress Catherine II (1762-1796) issued an invitation to foreign settlers from Western Europe to settle the steppes of Ukraine. During the next half century about half of the whole Prussian Mennonite population immigrated to the Ukrainian steppes. From here they eventually came to the United States and Canada, but that is another story, a long story that encompasses WWI and the Russian Revolution. Our immediate concern here is the Mennonites and their attitudes to peace and war and the implications thereof.

Article 22 of "Confessions of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective" states that "we believe that peace is the will of God. God created the world in peace and God's peace is most fully revealed in Jesus Christ, who is our peace and the peace of the whole world. Led by the Holy Spirit, we follow Christ in the way of peace, doing justice, bringing reconciliation, and practising nonresistance, even in the face of violence and warfare."

There are those who will insist that those are halcyon principles, completely unattainable in today's violent world. The early Mennonites anticipated the objection. T. D. Regehr states that "Mennonites did not expect those who had not voluntarily committed themselves to Jesus' way to follow and do all that he had taught. They recognized that

secular and worldly societies could not be governed by such principles. Regeneration, renewal, or rebirth involving a voluntary commitment to the Jesus Way was the prerequisite - the gate whereby the believer entered into the new spiritual life based on love and nonresistance." (p. 9). In short, the Jesus Way, even if it looked foolish to others, had to be applied to all human situations including all conflicts. In more recent history, Martin Luther King is to have exclaimed shortly before his death, "We must not be intimidated by those who are laughing at our belief in nonresistance." (The fact that there are fewer than one and a half million Mennonites the world over indicates how high Mennonites have set the bar for themselves.)

Mennonites attempt to fulfil the second part of their Confession, namely bringing reconciliation and love, through aid and relief agencies both locally, nationally, and internationally. Some of the local ones include Shalom Counselling, the Et Cetera Shoppe, the Mennonite Home; internationally the Mennonites are involved in Meat Canning endeavours, Christian Peacemaker Teams, Mennonite Disaster Service, Mennonite Central Committee, etc; nationally, Mennonites enthusiastically support Food Grains Bank.

Hopefully, this essay will have supplied sufficient background for some of the items that follow. Almost needless to say, not all Mennonites subscribe fully to the Mennonite peace principles, just as not all Catholics subscribe to the belief that the Church is the divinely appointed custodian of the Bible and has the final word on what is meant in any specific passage.

True Evangelical Faith

True evangelical faith does not lie sleeping
But it clothes the naked
It comforts the sorrowful
It gives to the hungry food
And it cares for the destitute

Menno Simons

Fitting Into The Community

I sometimes wonder who owns the memories of the past. If they belong only to the generation that actually lived the events, then clearly memories die with that generation. In this essay I propose to keep memory alive of those occurrences in the latter 1930s; in other words, just before WWII. Hopefully my effort will be an illuminated bridge between past and present. I admit at the onset, though, that I was hardly an active participant but had an excellent vantage point from which to observe and listen. Specifically I wish to critique the apparent mindset of many Leamington Mennonites as they sought to fit into a new community.

Very important was the fact that when the Mennonites arrived here beginning about 1924, there was no articulate, English-speaking Mennonite spokesperson in the community to explain to the mainly Anglo-Saxon population who we were and where we came from, and so we were the immigrants, the "Minkernites", where children came to school with the funny lunches and clothes. Some Mennonite adults reciprocated in kind, in private conversation of course, by referring to the Anglo-Saxons as *"De Englaenda"*, a demeaning term that was born out of the Ukrainian experience years ago. To Mennonites, the Ukrainian peasants were *"de Russe"*, living on the perimeter of Mennonite estates and industrial holdings and regarded as unlearned, boorish and uncultured. As a point of clarification my grandfather owned an estate of some five hundred acres; my wife's great grandfather owned two flour mills situated on the Ignatievo colony, which at one time had been the estate of the Ignatieffs, great grandparents of the present Liberal politician, Michael Ignatieff.

The parallel, however, between the Anglo-Saxons and Ukrainian peasants, did not apply here in Canada, for many Anglo-Saxons were educated, entrepreneurial, and cultured. Still, regrettably some of the old attitudes remained fixed like the colour of one's eyes.

But the living-in-closed-societies (shades of the European ghetto?) in Ukraine also brought to the Leamington Mennonite community attributes of separateness and insularity. For instance, Mennonites chose to have their own burial area at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery. The old, abandoned gravel pit behind Nickels' garage was the Mennonite skating rink. Since brides and grooms were Mennonite (intermarriage with other faiths was virtually unthinkable), weddings were opportune times for exclusive socializing.

Some fitting in and breaking down of barriers became necessary especially among Mennonite women whose families had not had a farming background in Ukraine. These

women went to work as house-keepers for well-to-do families in Leamington. My wife's grandmother, for example, went to work for Mr. Paterson, the patriarch of the well-known Paterson family. In fairness, though, Mennonites were so preoccupied with eking out a living in the Great Depression that intentional interactions were very much on the back burner of their existence.

But a fire-wall of separateness also existed because Mennonites spoke and conversed in German at home, at church, and at social gatherings so anyone unfamiliar with the language was automatically an outsider. German and religion were the twin towers of Mennonite faith. German (and dialects thereof) was said to be the language of the great forebears and hence was worthy of preservation at almost any cost. Moreover German was considered to be the language of culture, and writers like Goethe, Schiller, and Lessing were presented as ones to be emulated. (So far as I know, Shakepeare, Chaucer, Milton, etc., were unheard of).

The two-tier society in Leamington may have continued for many years had it not been for unsettling events in Europe; namely the expansionist policies of Germany including the invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939. Two days later Britain and France declared war on Germany and few days later Canada came to the support of the mother country.

If the three aforementioned allies were ill prepared for conflict and historians agree that they were, the Mennonites of Leamington in their own way were also unprepared. First, they had an incomplete and incoherent understanding of biblical nonresistance to war. There was no learned Harold Bender, the venerable Mennonite theologian, who in subsequent years formulated a doctrine based on Jesus' love and nonresistance and abandonment of violence, including the taking of human life.

Second, the Leamington Mennonites had had various experiences with conflict and war in their Ukrainian homeland especially during the Russian Revolution of 1917 and more particularly the country-wide anarchy that followed. In the Mennonite village of Eichenfeld, for instance, eighty-five villagers were gruesomely slaughtered in one night by murderous bandits. It was probably inevitable that the doctrines of nonresistance would no longer be a guiding principle of life among some Mennonite men. Thus they had organized themselves into a protective band for the purpose of offering some resistance to whatever dangers might threaten them in the future. Now in 1939, those who had participated in the protective bands were prepared, I believe, to support a defensive war should Canada call upon them to do so. Others felt that even a defensive war was basically contrary to Mennonite religious tenets.

A third faction strongly supported participation in hospital units as had been the case in Ukraine at the beginning of WWI. These units had included stretcher bearers who gathered the wounded on the battlefield, and hospital trains that transported them back to hospitals in Moscow. Some one hundred and twenty Mennonites lost their lives

in this service. Indeed the entire expense of the hospital service had been met by the Mennonites themselves without government participation. In 1943, a Canadian order-in-council made it possible for conscientious objectors to war to enlist in the Medical Corps of the Canadian army with all the duties of a soldier except they were not under any circumstances required to bear arms. Some chose this option.

In the end some Leamington Mennonites went into full active service, some joined the Medical Corps, and others served in various capacities on the home front as conscientious objectors.

A declaration of war at any rate demanded that Mennonites come out of the woodwork and give an account of themselves. In the fall of 1939, I began my seventh grade and before leaving for school was instructed by my mother to remember who I was and to walk away from any arguments and disputes. Since we had no radio at home and no newspaper of consequence, I failed the current events sessions but participated energetically in gathering milkweed pods, scrap iron (I had to return Dad's tire irons), and knitted scarves for the soldiers going overseas. In high school my life was dreadful but that account remains to be told.

At this time I remember the visit of the uniformed Colonel Fred Jasperson, who came to interview Dad concerning who the Mennonites were and what might be expected of them in the war. Dad reportedly replied that we were loyal citizens and would contribute what our individual consciences permitted. That reply was typical of Dad; namely, in matters of conscience, the genuine Christian is more obligated to be loyal to conscience than to any other calling.

Fitting in came about slowly, but as more mutual respect and trust developed between Mennonites and those who were already established here before the Mennonites came, a harmonious relationship evolved.

Mennonites are grateful to have been able to take their place as citizens in a great Canadian society that permits them to retain and cherish their culture. Today Mennonites participate in several levels of government, in community organizations, and wherever else service to others is required.

Missing The Bull's Eye

When I began high school in Leamington, World War II had already waged for several years. I have said in *There Was A Boy* that I was expected to go to high school even though once enrolled I often wondered why I was being punished for being there. I never thought that book learning and boot camp would be almost inseparable.

Our principal was an ultra patriot, and even though he never joined the armed forces himself, he saw to it that his high school contributed a disproportionately high number of recruits to the Canadian war effort. Thus basic training for everyone ranked almost equal in worth with academic endeavours. Basic training included army organization, route marches, aircraft recognition, etc. On one occasion we marched as an entire school all the way to the new cemetery on the Ridge and back again. Harry Turner, a grade eleven student, pounded his drum to help us all keep in step. Military service recruiters visited the school regularly and voiced the benefits of the military. Students were permitted to leave class to speak to a recruiter. All students were expected to buy war savings stamps and bonds.

I think I was a good cadet, rising in the ranks quickly from private to lance corporal and beyond in my platoon. I had a natural sense of rhythm, and so marching in step was second nature, and coming from an authoritarian family I found it easy to obey orders.

My downfall came when at the beginning of winter, rifle practice began in the gym. I had never discharged a firearm in my life and now I was compelled to participate in the activity. Although we were never told that we were practising to fire at people, I knew in my heart that that was indeed the purpose.

My teacher saw that I was hesitant to "belly down" and take aim, and so began browbeating, "Why you little coward! You'll never be a soldier and fight for king and country. Now belly down and fire."

I did exactly that but aimed poorly so that the bullet missed the target and embedded itself in the bricks in the south end of the gym. What happened next is too terrible to report.

When I came home from school that day I unthinkingly said to mother, "Mom I missed the bull's eye!" By now I had decided to make light of my rifle experience and get on with my life.

"I'm glad you missed it!" (She had in mind the Evans' pesky animal across the creek.)

"No, Mom, I shot a gun at school and missed the target."

"You mean you actually pulled the trigger on a loaded gun?"

"Yes, and luckily nobody got hurt." (Mom was still paranoid about those terrorist bands in Ukraine, who terrorized and killed innocent people.)

"Well, I don't think you should have done it!" (Nice for her to have said that.) "Anyway, we'll have to speak to Dad about this."

I sensed that really I would never be a soldier now.

Dad saw this as an opportunity to demonstrate his (not entirely mine) convictions to the community at large of a peace-loving, nonresistant Mennonite people, and I was to be the sacrificial lamb. He contacted his counterpart in the Mennonite Brethren Church, Rev. I. Tiessen, and together they asked to appear before the school board and request exemptions from rifle practice for Mennonite students. The high school publication *Centennial Celebration 1896-1996* (p. 76) reports the following: "Some Mennonite boys protested being compelled to participate on the basis of their religious belief in pacifism. The board countered with the threat of expulsion. One must suspect that this was a contributing motive for the founding of UMEI in 1945."

I find it interesting now that only "some" boys protested. I assume the other group was wise enough not to have informed their parents about the issue or else their parents had no religious qualms about rifle practice.

Soon after in gym class the principal took me aside and whispered, "Jake, you will be exempt from now on from rifle practice." What he did not say was where I should be going during that time. If at the range, I would surely be ridiculed by the others for not taking my turn. If in the study room, I would surely raise the suspicion of the supervisor. In short, I became a fugitive during the practice, making myself as inconspicuous as possible. Meanwhile, Dad had no idea what I was going through, and it would have been futile to tell him. The principal, for his part, saved my education by influencing the board to permit me to stay in school.

The events just described ended my military career, if indeed it even got started, but I was left with a few haunting questions about soldiering. First, how could Dad's position be right when almost the entire school and the community had the opposite viewpoint? In fact, some of my teachers, both women and men, left the classroom and enlisted in the armed forces. Secondly, how could I stand back when many of my schoolmates were marching off to war? I felt guilty that I was not contributing to a cause that the popular song of the day beckoned, "This is worth fighting for!" The song recalls that the folk before us fought for this country long before the present generation was born.

Lastly, I felt that we were creating more problems for ourselves than was necessary. The immigrant experience was bad enough without adding and intensifying the hardships associated with it. These issues were to reappear after a few years. That spring I applied for farm leave, partly because it gave me an earlier exit from the school that I detested. Two decades later I returned as a teacher and faced the same principal. This time I was regarded not as a wormy Mennonite but as one with high recommendations from the district inspector. Further, I no longer felt the sting and loneliness of an outsider although I didn't have the self-assurance of a Conrad Black in his princely days. In the almost three decades there as an English teacher, I breathed some wonderful years of quintessential satisfaction.

PART II

But sometimes the adversary is unhearing
Of our attempts to make peace
It is then that we must act
Vowing, however, that next time
We'll choose the better way

Pte. Rudy Wiens

Those Who Served

For an account of the contributions of the Mennonites who entered alternative service in WWII, I refer the reader to the book, *Mennonite Peace Perspectives*, published by the Essex-Kent Mennonite Historical Association and edited by Victor Kliewer.

Most Mennonites who opted for active service have passed on and the very few who remain I have not seen in public for years, I assume because of failing health. Fearing that asking them to recall their war experiences could agitate them further, I have chosen to write about two non-Mennonite airmen that I knew, one who was killed in action and one who returned to civilian life as an educator after the war.

Murray Wiper was my neighbour on the second concession in the former Mersea Township. I met him at the annual threshing bee at the Lavender farm across the road from our farm. Other farmers participating in this event were the Evanses, the Danforths, etc. One thing I noticed about Murray was that when we were pitching sheaves of grain onto the wagon, he would pause whenever a plane flew overhead, as if his future was already being crystallized. He had a strong work ethic with an appetite to match. His favourite food seemed to be meat and potatoes, while mine was dessert, especially apple pie. Murray was the oldest of the boys in the Wiper family. He volunteered long before he would have been drafted. Moreover, since he was needed on the farm, he could have requested and obtained a deferment, but in my conversation with his brother Dwain, he apparently told his father,

"I am enlisting because I am needed."

Perhaps there may have been some motivation to escape the drudgery and mundaneness of farm life, but Dwain does not mention that. I presume that others volunteered because the army offered clean clothes and three good meals a day. In the 1930s, for instance, hungry men in rags stopped at our farm and earnestly asked for food. They were never turned away and despite Mom's misgivings about serving them Mennonite meals, these starved souls ate ravenously. I heard of other farmers offering "tramps" a place to sleep in the haymow. Murray did not fit the mould just described - his motivations were patriotically driven.

And so Murray left the security of the farm and the peace and quietness of rural life to confront and destroy what we were told was the axis of evil on the other side of the Atlantic.

I wonder now if he knew the song that I learned at Ruthven Public School:

> When Johnny comes marching home again
> Hurrah, hurrah
> We'll give him a hearty welcome then
> Hurrah, hurrah
> The men will cheer, the boys will shout
> The ladies they will all turn out
> And we'll all feel joy
> When Johnny comes marching home.

A fellow teacher at Leamington High School who had piloted a Lancaster bomber, the type of plane on which Murray Wiper served, informed me what the experience of flying a sortie (mission) was like. (Dwain explained that since Murray did not have the education to fly the bomber, he trained as a rear turret air gunner.) The rear gunner served as the eyes of the pilot for behind views, as well as those below. If the enemy got the rear gunner, they got the plane. The "Lancs" were the workhorses of the air force, but vulnerable to powerful German gunfire. Five percent of the bombers which set out each night failed to return, making service in bombers the most dangerous field in the allied military. The weapon of the rear turret gunner and other gunners was the .303 machine gun. Quarters for all gunners were severely cramped and frostbite was not uncommon; yet Murray flew thirty-five sorties over Europe. Dwain graciously permitted me to read the letters that Murray sent home, and to have the information about Murray published. Several random excerpts from the letters follow:

June 29, 1942 (Hagersville, Ontario)
I'm off to the dance tonight. It will bring the crowd out and we can see the women folk. You never see any of the nicer girls there.

October 6, 1942 (Lachine, Quebec)
This place does not come near Ontario for beauty. It is a rainy day and I still have not got a rain coat.

January 12, 1943
I managed to hit the headlines in the paper over here. We had a couple of scraps one night over Berlin and I had some hits.

May 9, 1943
The turrets are the biggest problem. Three different ones and all have different hydraulic systems.

September 21, 1943
I suppose yesterday was the first day of the Leamington Fair and you will be arguing over who goes first.

October 22, 1943
We have women drivers for our trucks over here and you can imagine what a beating those poor trucks take.

November 13, 1943
You may borrow money from my monthly allowance for the house or barn. It does me no good until I finish here, and between us I got a long, crooked road to travel.

November 29, 1943
I suppose Pop is busier than ever. By the way, say hello to the pigs. Ha ha ha.

December 12, 1943
Thanks for the maple syrup. That soup stuff was sure good, too, so you can send me a couple more cans. I put biscuits in it. You don't realize how good you have it until you can't get it anymore.

December 19, 1944
I sure can't figure out how things are running back home. They're calling up married men with families when I know a couple of single fellows who have dodged it ever since the war started.

Murray Wiper did not come marching home, and the ladies did not turn out to welcome him back. In a foray over Germany, he was shot down and perished, age twenty-one, but for a time he had

...slipped the surly bonds of earth
...where never lark or eagle flew
...put out (his) hand and touched the face of God
...lines from "High Flight" (John Magee Jr.)

And so when I go up to Jackson Park in Windsor to the Lancaster bomber* mounted on the pedestal and see Murray Wiper's name on the bronze plaque, I take a moment to remember him as the person he was.

Short days ago (he) lived
Felt dawn, saw sunset glow
Loved and (was) loved
But now (he lies) in...

Murray Wiper is buried in Hanover War Cemetery, Germany.

*In the spring of 2005, the Lancaster was taken off its pedestal and moved to an enclosed area away from weather attacks.

Soaring High

He is not dead
but soaring higher
than he'd ever climbed
far out of reach
of menacing machines
and sounds of quaking earth
where form no clouds
or ever wind blows loudly
in those ethereal valleys
from which no flier
ever longs for a return

****

I first met Charlie Campbell in the early 1950s when during the summer I was an early fruit and vegetable inspector at the Coghill receiving station in Kingsville. He immediately impressed me as a gentleman, friendly and not a trace of being overborne. He spoke generally of his World War II experience, but not in a boastful or annoying manner.

We interacted again to some extent when we were both educators - he as vice-principal at Kingsville High School and I as English department head at Leamington High School. After our respective retirement, there was no further communication between us, but I read in the media that Charlie was very keen and active in establishing a military museum in Kingsville as a tribute to those in the area who had served their country. The Charlie Campbell Memorial Museum was completed before Charlie's death.

On a recent visit to the museum, I learned from the chairman of the curatorial committee, Mr. Peter O'Shaughnessy, that like Murray Wiper, Charlie Campbell had served as an air gunner, but in the mid-upper gun turret of a Lancaster bomber. He apparently flew nineteen sorties and survived them all. What I find interesting in his logbook is that on March 21st, 1945, they lost one of their aircraft, conducted a sea search, but his "no joy" comment euphemistically expresses the result.

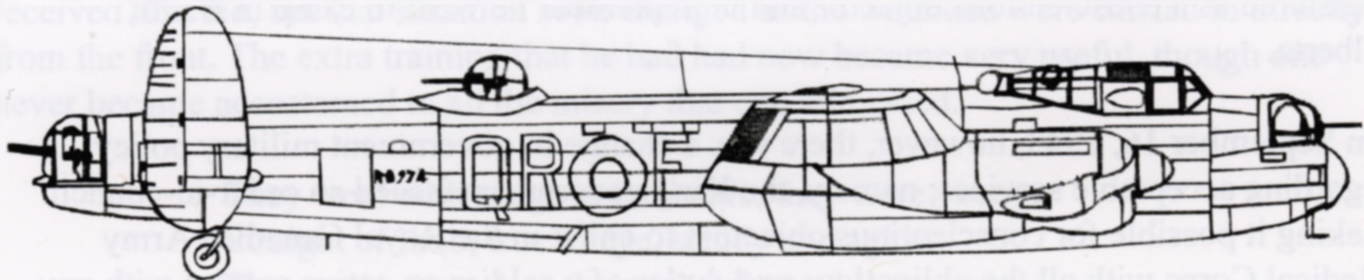
Mounted in the museum is this wall hanging:

> We do not glorify the acts of war
> but remember the consequences and
> the cost of freedom. Future generations must
> learn about man's inhumanity to man so they
> in turn will value man's humanity to man

Charlie Campbell's Logbook

A PART OF CHARLIE'S LOGBOOK

Date	Hr.	Aircraft type and #	Pilot	Remarks	Day	Night
7/3/45	18.35	Lancaster VR-P	F/L Watts	To Dessau - diverted to Ford Bomb load: 1 by 4000 - 7 clusters of incendiary		8.55
8/3/45	11.28	Lancaster VR-P	F/L Watts	Return from Ford	1.30	
12/3/45	13.00	Lancaster VR-P	F/L Watts	To Dortmund Bomb load 1x4000 16x500 lbs	6.05	
21/3/45	13.25	Lancaster VR-P	F/L Watts	Sea Search for VR-P		
				No Joy	6.45	



AVRO LANCASTER Mk 1

****

Rudy Wiens originally came from Reesor, Ontario, but he called Leamington his home; in fact, Leamington adopted him after he became administrator of the Mennonite Home in 1980.

Like many others his age, the announcement at the outbreak of war fazed him little because he had his education to be concerned about; he was not yet of military age and thought of himself as a conscientious objector, whatever that term really meant. When, however, the first person from his church was called up, a new reality set in for him.

His Dad had shown him pictures and told him stories of how he had served in the Red Cross Corps during WWI in Russia. At the beginning of that war, Russia was fighting with Britain and other countries against Germany.

His Dad's influence inculcated in Rudy a desire to assist the wounded on the battlefield should war service ever be required of him. Bishop Jacob Janzen of Waterloo approved of some kind of alternative service in the Canadian Medical Corps, and Rudy's parents rather reluctantly agreed to abide by Rudy's intentions. There was also the possibility of serving as a fire fighter during the German air raids on London, England.

In 1943 Rudy was working on Bright's Farms in Niagara when he received his call to serve his country. With the assistance of Reverend Kroeker he appeared in court and registered as a conscientious objector and in September he went to camp in Banff, Alberta.

On September 16, 1943, however, there was a change in government military policy regarding acceptable services; namely, the King government issued an order-in-council making it possible for conscientious objectors to enlist in the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps with all the obligations and duties of a soldier on active service with any unit or formation of the Army except that he was not under any circumstances to bear arms.

And so Rudy was in Banff only a few weeks before he enlisted. Others in the camp had thought to dissuade him, arguing that the order-in-council was a ploy that could easily be reversed with a wink and a nudge. Besides, men like Rudy would be ridiculed if they were carrying stretchers instead of a gun. Nonetheless, the recruiting officer assured Rudy that he would not have to take up arms and Rudy took him at his word.

Throughout the rest of the war, the promise was kept, but since Rudy was fluent in

German, he was strongly encouraged to join the Intelligence Service, an offer he declined.

He trained in Calgary, Peterborough, Camp Borden, and Listowel; and at the beginning of the next June boarded the *New Amsterdam* and set out for overseas. On D-Day, he and his fellow recruits were crossing the Atlantic. The ocean was calm and only a few men never got their sea-legs. Every seven minutes the ship was required to change course because it took that long for a U boat to take aim at its target. The sleeping quarters of this ship were below sea level and each section would automatically close if a torpedo hit that area. The men spent most of their time on deck, but when the alarm went off there was an orderly rush to their quarters. An alarm signified that a U boat had been spotted.

After six days at sea, the men landed in Scotland near Greenock on the Clyde River. Their introduction to Scotland was a pleasant one with scenic hillsides and historic buildings.

Rudy's camp near London had a round, steel roof and walls. Meanwhile V^1 missiles (sent by remote control) were raining down on the big city. Then there was always the dread of a German air raid on the city as well as the more sophisticated V^2.

While off duty in London, he enrolled in courses to improve his orderly skills and raise his pay to boot. With the highest possible certificate for his rank, he was now assigned to the officers' ward.

Late in the summer of 1944, his group was moved to a hospital known as the 24th Canadian Hospital. It was situated near Crowly, south of London, on the London-Brighton line. At first, most of the wounded Canadians who arrived there had already received first aid, but that situation soon changed as the wounded were carried in directly from the front. The extra training that he had had now became very useful, though one never became accustomed to all the misery that one witnessed.

> They went with songs to the battle, they were young,
> Straight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow,
> They were staunch to the end against odds uncounted
> They fell with their faces to the foe.
>
> from "For the Fallen" by Laurence Binyon

In the first month of duty in the hospital, Rudy lost twenty-five pounds. Sometimes he and other orderlies were ridiculed for not having gone active. On the other hand, some were harassed for being too eager to act as evangelists in addition to performing their other duties. The most successful methods in relating to the wounded were through love, care, and service.

Rudy returned to Canada on the *Lady Nelson* in November, 1945. On the ship he met another nursing orderly, Henry Epp from Harrow.

Unlike some other veterans, Rudy served the Mennonite Church on his discharge. (The fault was by no means all one-sided. The church could have been more accommodating in integrating all returning Mennonite veterans.) In addition to serving in the choir, Rudy held many responsible positions in various church programmes and committees. From 1980-1989 he served as administrator at the Leamington Mennonite Home and Apartments.

But he was ever reluctant to acknowledge that he was honoured with three medals for his service to his country.

Rudy died in Leamington on December 14, 2003.

Vimy Ridge

Found in my open ditch
continents removed from the killing fields
a rusty army helmet rests
in my basement storage

On Remembrance Day I muster courage
to wear it briefly
and vicarious storm the battlements
of Vimy Ridge
weary, sullied, home-sick, rat-scarred
oblivious of the shadow - Death

The helmet off I am myself again
a marvel not accorded Vimy men

The stairs ascending I slip
and slither headdown in slime embankment
into a fecal, muddy brew
and cry in unabashed nauseation

Then far away I seem to faintly hear
a someone slowly pulling down the window blinds

My Answer To Dad's Letter When I Was At The University (Fall 1946)

Dad, I too believe war to be wrong
It is the avarice, fear, and hate
In all humankind
That makes such a horrible wrong possible
And since this evil is so destructive
We must use reason, persuasion, and love
To settle our differences at every turn

But sometimes the adversary is unhearing
Of our attempts to make peace
It is then we must act
Praying and resolving that next time
Insofar as is within our sway
The other and better way will prevail

Here at the university I interact daily with seasoned veterans
I marvel at their decency and probity
The white-haired sleeping vet in English class
The lusty tenor beside me in the vesper choir
Newly returned from Okinawa, Omaha Beach, Ardennes
With secrets I can never know

I believe, Dad, that all of us
Have an instinct to resist evil when we see it
It may be less than righteous instinct
But it is there in millions
Of moral men and women

Sometimes it is within our nature to stand back
Let others do the mucky business for us
You told me once that Russian peasants
Guarded Grandpa's blue-ribbon melon patch
While his own sons stood back and smiled

You thought the uninvolvement privilege rendered
Well, those attitudes are here passé
Our peace and freedom were won with straight involvement
No flights into the wilderness or farm back forties
Peace purifies itself in nursing wounds and stretcher bearing
Not inconceivable in the use of ordnances

I know, Dad, I am not convincing
You'll say that learning has obtund the mind
But still I hope you'll try to understand

*Kursk Gulag

Out from the depths they cried
to an unknown god
from the rancid reaches
of their cold and breathless prison
on the bed of the Barents Sea

Weep over your son, Valentina
but reserve your love package
for another famished boy
and praise that Dimitri's resting place
is known and marked

Out of the depths they cried
to Jehovah, their God
from the cramped coal pits, the endless taiga
the icy hovels of the convicted exiles
in the land of the prole paradise

Weep, Aganetha, for your
tormented husband, Johann, lost
wherever he lies
forsaken and unknown

Let your ear be attentive
To all suppliants, O God

*On August 12, 2000, 118 Russian submariners died when their submarine accidentally sank.

Charity

Seek but to benefit thy fellow-man;
Let smiles, not frowns, his rugged path assail,
Better with blinded eye his faults to scan
Than let the sin of wrong and scorn prevail

O Charity! Unfold thy pure, white wings,
Teach us to suffer and to forbear;
To hurl no darts, no evil, bitter stings,
For life is mindful and full of care.

Then fold, fold us, in thy pure, white wings,
Shield us from ourselves, and let us see
Only good in others, and the joy that brings
Peace to us in life and in eternity.

Lieut. Colonel J. R. Wilkinson
Leamington, 1899

PART III

When tillage begins, other arts follow.
Farmers are therefore the founders of human civilization.

Daniel Webster 1782-1852

My First Real Paying Job

In the summer of 1942, I received my first real job. Yes, I had had various jobs on our small farm, and had done some piece work such as picking strawberries, raspberries, etc; but now I was ready for a man's job in the tobacco fields.

Perhaps a short history of tobacco growing in the Leamington area is appropriate here. In Ontario, the tobacco growing industry was started in Essex and Kent Counties by the United Empire Loyalists. Emigrating from the Southern States during the American Revolution, they brought with them tobacco seeds for their new farms.

At first air-cured burley tobacco was widely grown, but then a new method of curing was developed that produced tobacco most suitable for use in cigarettes. The development revolutionized the Canadian tobacco industry.

William T. Gregory and his brother Francis were responsible for the development of the flue-cure tobacco in Canada. William arrived in Leamington from South Carolina at a time when burley tobacco was being grown and decided to experiment with Virginia tobacco. Francis supervised the experimental plants and soon discovered that desirable soil types and a longer frost-free autumn made Leamington an ideal area for tobacco growing.

In time Norfolk County, particularly the Simcoe area, became the tobacco capital of Ontario. The first successful crops were grown there in the 1920s, and so a new era began in the history of Canadian tobacco.

No doubt some readers will be filled with dismay and consternation that good Mennonites were once good tobacco growers here. I don't want to become too defensive here about the practice except to point out that tobacco was not a health issue in the 1940s. Men who smoked did so for either masculine pride or "smoking pleasure", as the English used to say. Nobody denied it was a dirty and foul-smelling habit, but to accuse a father of child abuse for smoking in the family home was unthinkable. It is an indisputable fact, though, that income from tobacco paid off many farm mortgages and provided financial aid for worthy charities such as UMEI, CMBC, etc.

Tobacco ceased to be grown in the Leamington area many years ago, and what we know now of its negative impact on health, nobody is bemoaning its demise. Only the odd weathered and crumbling curing kilns are grim reminders of a once thriving industry. (I digress.)

In its heyday, tobacco farming was almost an every season crop. In early spring the seed was sown in hotbeds, and when the seedlings were several inches tall, they were transplanted by machine into the field, then lovingly cultivated, hoed, and sprayed with insecticide. In summer the plant was topped so that the tobacco leaves would increase in size, for later on, size and colour of leaf would count for everything.

My job began with the harvesting, usually about the middle of August. A harvesting complement consisted of a minimum of fourteen workers, both men and women. Five others and I were primers, meaning that we were out in the field picking the leaves off the tobacco plant, beginning with the mature ones at the bottom of the plant.

My harvesting day began very early because I had to bike several miles to work, carrying my lunch box and other paraphernalia. (No, I never walked to school bare-footed in two feet of snow.) By eight o'clock at the latest, the primers were out in the field, stooped over like immigrant coolies as they picked the leaves from the tobacco plant dripping with morning dew, but macho men didn't wear raincoats or rubber boots. Soaked to the skin, the men would sing:

> "Row, row, row your boat"
> *"Von der Erde reiss mich los"* (from this earth tear me away)
> "We are gathering at the river"

After the sun dried the leaves, the heat became our adversary, baking our backs and slowing our gait. Furthermore, a dry plant exudes black, foul-smelling, sticky tar that besmirched not only the hands, but anything the tobacco leaves came in contact with. One of the primers crowed that he never washed his clothes from the beginning of the priming season right to the very end. Then at the end of the season he used the pant legs from his trousers as stove pipes in his house. It should be noted too that once the harvest began in the morning, there was no turning back because of bad weather, for the curing kiln had to be full. It was economically unsound to stoke up a fire with the kiln only partly full.

Meanwhile, the tiers situated beside the kiln were tying the tobacco leaves onto a set number of wooden laths so that once these laths were full the tiers knew that enough tobacco had been tied to fill the kiln. Then the primers came in from the field and hung the full laths inside the kiln. At that point my day ended, and I was free to bike home.

For a full day's work, I received three dollars, and that was a premium wage. That season I helped to fill twenty-seven kilns with my entire wage going to my parents.

Perhaps surprisingly, I never had the inclination to become a professional smoker, partly because I could not afford the cost and partly because of my experience in the tobacco

fields. I reasoned if the black tar inside my body was as black as the tar on my hands after a day of priming, I wanted no part of the habit.

The last cigarette I smoked was in August, 1964, on Bloor Street, just outside Varsity Stadium, Toronto. I had been marking Grade 13 English Department Examinations when near the end of the day I encountered a number of inferior papers that gave me a very sour taste. Instead of simply chewing gum, I asked my colleague for a cigarette on our way back to the dormitory. Before we got to our destination he said to me in an uncharitable tone very much unlike him, "Jake, your breath smells like sewaged socks." That was all the comment I needed in order to butt out forever.

Priming (pulling) tobacco leaves

The loose leaves are handed to the tier who ties them to wooden laths which will be later hung in the tobacco kiln. Eventually the tobacco will be sold as flue-cured tobacco.

Apple Pruning

My sharpened shears
Bent on effacement
On my fingers
Primordial impulse for destruction

I attempt civility
Whisper caution
Wheat and tares
Gold and pyrite

Conflict of shears and me
Abuse - remediation

Have a coffee
Take a walk
Get the mail
Delay

And so I shall
Cellphone Adam and maiden
Primal gardeners
With professional instruction

But can you fathom
Two nakeds in my apple tree
Offering pruning lessons 101
On County Road 18
Traffic agog amuck
Noses pressed up against the window glass
And novice pruner disoriented quite

No, keep them away
Let my sheers go batty
Let there be flaws
Let there be order on County Road 18

The Farmall A

In the 1930s, the International Harvester Company produced a tractor that was to revolutionize small farm agriculture. Unfortunately WWII began in the same year and hence production lines retooled to manufacture war matériel.

At the end of the war, however, production for the domestic market restarted and farmers were ready both agronomically and financially to revolutionize their farming operations. Farm produce had sold well during the war, early potatoes selling for three dollars a bag and early tomatoes even higher per basket, in each case depending on the time they were ready for market.

The tractor of choice for most farmers was the Farmall A, although Allis Chalmers and John Deere had competitive models. The Farmall A was intriguing because the motor was mounted toward the left so that the driver had an unobstructed view of the row ahead of him. However, the position of the engine came at a cost alleged Allis Chalmers enthusiasts; namely, the left side of the tractor could never be in the furrow during ploughing. (In reality, I never saw one ever tip over.)

Surprisingly, though, there were few negative attitudes toward tractors generally. A few feared soil compaction, and still others feared a return to fuel rationing, in which case, our dead horse, *Kunta*, would have to be resurrected and have the last laugh.

But the majority envisioned a host of advantages. Heading the list were the greatly reduced working hours for the family, allowing more than ample time for visiting relatives, interacting with neighbours, and taking family vacations. A Wigle hoeing attachment, for instance, mounted on the back of a Farmall A could reduce manual hoeing time by a number of sunsets. A tractor made horses virtually obsolete, again reducing chore time, although a few farmers kept a horse mainly for sentimental reasons. With horses eventually gone, poor Bessie's days were also numbered since it seemed nonsensical and counterproductive to be attentive to one lonely cow.

There were other advantages too. The tractor's pull on a tomato planter was smooth and consistent, permitting perfect spacing of plants within the row. Further, a farmer's expertise was judged in part by the straightness of his tomato rows. A tractor oblivious to horse flies and other distractions made the township a mathematician's feast of parallel lines. Tractors with their comfortable seats changed farming to a sedentary occupation, and walking became limited to a stroll from home to machine shed. Mr. Devon even used his trailer pulled by a Pony tractor to go to town for groceries.

The first ECUMCer to buy a tractor was my cousin, J. P. Driedger, who opted for an Allis

Chalmers B, a sleek, symmetrical orange-coloured machine, that actually looked like what you might expect from a tractor. On the other hand, collective opinion has it that Mr. Jacob Hamm Sr. owned the first Farmall A. (Jacob Founk concurs with that opinion.) Mr. Hamm was a progressive farmer at the worst of times, and the acquisition of a tractor chagrined his Mennonite compatriots, including my uncle who farmed on Highway 3. It should be noted here that when tractors became popular, demand far exceeded supply, and the International dealer in Leamington had his Farmall A's sold before they could be displayed in the showroom and dealer's lot.

My Dad, as usual, could not compete for a new tractor, even had his name been recorded at the top of the waiting list, because money was an endangered species in our house. But several compassionate members at ECUMC including Mr. Hamm and Mr. Jacob Founk Sr., pooled resources for the purpose of buying Dad a used Farmall A should one ever become available. Sure enough, one day the impossible became reality, and the Matheson dealership in Leamington was put on notice to reserve it for the Mennonite consortium or else there would be consequences. (So far as I know, the consequences were not spelled out. Surely not a business boycott!)

When the tractor arrived, the money was transferred to Dad's account and Dad paid Matheson 575.00 dollars for the tractor. It was a Farmall A with the added feature of having a home-made, wooden cab on it. The latter we immediately dismantled because it blocked almost all sight lines.

The tractor was a godsend for Dad. Not that he drove it much! By now his boys were doing the physical work on the farm and easily adjusted to any tractor work. Dad's hole-in-one was the fact that he never had to touch a horse again, something he had always detested.

So did the tractor bring on the anticipated utopian days on the farm? Hardly. Instead of a shortened working day, the day was drawn out into the evenings because the great liberator came equipped with lights, never grumbled, and never got tired. Instead of enjoying their leisure time farmers were inclined to increase their production and avariciously competed for the early vegetable market in Toronto, Montreal, etc. In the end, the small producer, satisfied with his lot, was elbowed out to the sidelines.

One side effect, though, of the Farmall A had been totally unforeseen when the machine was introduced to the farm. Heretofore farm women had been relegated to hoe-wielding labourers, but the Farmall A was so docile, so simple to operate that women took to it the way they went from rag mop to the vacuum cleaner. From that point on there was just a small step further to driving a car, a giant step in women's liberation.

The Farmall A revolutionized farming in the Mennonite community even more than did the multi-share *bukker* plow and seeder on the Mennonite steppes in Ukraine in the 1880s.

The John Deere B

When nags at last ran out of umpf
No need for haw and gee
The verdant beast that took their place
Was called the John Deere B

The nags at times would want a rest
Or pause to have a pee
The anthropod just putted on
It was the John Deere B

It didn't eat, it didn't gripe
It wouldn't hee-haw-hee
It never ever came in heat
This mare, the John Deere B

The emerald beast just wouldn't quit
It craved activity
The driver cried, "My body's flagged"
"Not mine," the John Deere B

With three short hours for food and sleep
Putt-putt monotony
The driver moaned, "I've had enough"
And choked the John Deere B

And then a blessed time returned
And even time for tea
Two bodacious bods pranced in the field
The B was history.

Heinz Ketchup

I spent most of my summers working on the home farm, but this year my cupboard was virtually bare as usual. The Heinz company appealed for workers, it was within easy walking distance, the wages sounded good, and even though I had never worked in a factory before, I decided to sign up.

I applied one day and started the next. Each twelve hour shift paid sixty-five cents per hour with a bonus of a nickel on the night shift.

I was assigned to the cookroom, making ketchup, and when Tony, the cook, saw my horny and calloused hands, he ordered, "Jike, yo vill be mine elper. No, dere ees no extra money. Remember yo ees vorking vor Heinz. Geud factoree."

Along one side of the cookroom stood a line of about ten stainless steel vats, each with a capacity equal to forty dozen bottles of ketchup. Above each vat was a device that controlled the inflow of juice into the vat. Beside each, was a steel lever about a foot long that determined the direction of the outflow of the finished ketchup. Moved north, the lever sent the ketchup on a long journey purportedly into Lake Erie. Moved south, it went into the bottling works. (Or was it the other way around?) In any case, I should point out, the land on which the pollution centre stands today was still being farmed; thus the disposal system in those days was not environmentally sound at best.

The day shift was tolerable; the night shift inhuman. The room was hot and steamy at best, but when outside temperatures were high, the punishment on the body was even worse. At night, the body begged for sleep, and yet the working environment required full alertness. A few workers after midnight slunk away into hibernation somewhere, and reappeared toward morning, but I had been brought up on the Pablum that "the labourer must be worthy of his hire", and so I endured.

Once a measured amount of juice had flowed into the vat, another cookroom employee, Abe Friesen, poured in a certain quantity of ingredients he had carefully mixed. These ingredients gave the ketchup the superior and distinctive Heinz flavour and quality. When the heat was put to the vats, the cook had to be careful to monitor the temperature and to maintain it at a certain level until the product was perfect.

One very early morning before the hibernators had returned, Tony called, "C'mon ova hea, Jike. I'm goin' vora cofee. Yer in sharge 'til I git back. Don't schkroo oop!"

"*Holem di kukuk*" (curse) I muttered. What responsibility! The weight of the whole factory on my inexperienced shoulders! If I bungled, Heinz International was down the drain.

I went to work reading the thermometer more often than required, smelling the hot cauldron to confirm it smelled like real ketchup. The time came when the ketchup was ready, but Tony was still enjoying his coffee. I began wondering if it was possible to have ketchup overdone, and what would be the effect on the taste. Then I remembered that the road to resolution begins with doubt. The doubt I had been through, and now it was time to act. I took a firm hold on the lever; then moved it all the way to the north, and immediately felt the surge of satisfaction that only great achievers feel, like a new student's euphoria when attempting his first answer in class finds that his answer is flawless.

My triumph was interrupted by Tony, who after staring at the lever, turned pale as an under-ripe tomato. "Jike, yo flooshed the ol ---- krood down the shoor." Then when he caught his breath again, "Don't you eva tell nobody nuttin' about dis. It'll cost yah yer shob."

I had no intention of ratting on anyone, but to calm Tony he and I shook hands as the seal of an everlasting silence pact … but now I think the word must be out on how Jake Driedger almost brought the world's greatest food company to its knees.

My short stint at Heinz taught me some important lessons. First, unless you need an ego boost, never accept a promotion when it is an end in itself. The added stress is not worth the promotion.

Secondly, familiarity breeds contempt as noted in the Aesop fable "The Fox and the Lion." In my case, I discovered that the ketchup smell is systemic, imbuing all facets of life, including workplace, home, and church. One Sunday morning at church someone said to me, "I bet I know where you work!" I empathized with Lady Macbeth's cry, "Will these hands ne'er be clean?" I came to abhor the smell and taste of ketchup, preferring instead the company's mustard and relish for seasoning. Only recently have I begun to add a little on my food again, partly to come to terms with my Heinz past. (Incidentally, the ketchup episode is similar to the chocolate milk episode when I worked part-time at the Lichtenberger Dairy in Fort Erie. There I mistakenly flushed a dozen bottles down the drain.)

Thirdly, disliking a job is a strong incentive to look for something better. Fortunately, I was young, mobile, and ambitious, still looking for a city set on a hill. However, I respect those in the cookroom who had to stay and persevere, and wait for better working conditions. Hopefully, they too are enjoying a relaxed retirement.

the travails of the tomato farmer 1999

he milked the empty summer clouds
until his arms collapsed
he loathed the rising sun
abhorred its cloudless setting
he dreamed umbrella thoughts
and wakened smelling rainbows
he sighed again for rutted fields
and buried harvesters

meanwhile his baby plants
birthed their own babies
ugly and undernourished
lost for an adulthood
and destined for unsung burials

when last seen however
he bedded smiling lands
with shiny green machine
for next year's bumper yields

The Rural Mailbox

One of the many bonuses of living in the country is having a mailbox in front of one's property on a scenic country road. Countrified mailboxes are an extension of the rural personality. Ours is black, not because the world is a grim and dreary place but because of our precautionary nature. Our black box is a signal to the snowplow to stay well clear of it. One of the worst country jobs is setting up a mailbox in the dead of winter. On the lid of our box is a horseshoe, a relic of our beloved *Kunta*, who would have been fifty-eight this summer. (May he rest in peace.) Whether *Kunta's* shoe always brings good luck is an open question.

I have seen mailboxes mounted on an antique, horse-drawn plow; on a log chain, welded so that the links don't collapse. I have seen a farmer with a mailbox so rigged up that he receives only air mail.

Mailboxes, generally speaking, have a short life span. As mentioned before, they are vulnerable to a snowplow attack. Then on Hallowe'en night, when all the two-holers have been flattened by the town's idiots, the mailboxes have to endure the next foray by the same blockheads. When I was still teaching, several Grade ten Occupations students crowed about how they had chained a long, steel post to the front bumper of their pick-up. Then they extended the post about three feet to the right and proceeded down the concession roads, mowing down the mailboxes as if it was haying time. It cost them dearly, though, to realign the front end of their truck. When I was growing up, we used to pasture our cow on road property, and at the end of the day would wrap her chain around the mailbox to interrupt her flight back to the barn. It seems we were always replacing posts.

It is interesting to observe people as they walk with their mail from the mailbox back to their house. Some stand in the middle of the road as they peruse their pack. Others run from the mailbox to their house as if they can't wait to read the missive from a seemingly lost friend. Others return as if walking to the gallows, head bent, leaving one to surmise the reason for their dejection. Fortunately, the cars on the country roads are aware of rural foibles and discreetly make allowances.

I had one very bad experience with mailboxes years ago. I should point out first, however, that one of the side effects of Dad's being a pastor was the disproportionately large volume of letters we received compared with what others were apparently receiving. In those days surface mail was the way to communicate. (We did not have a telephone until about 1941.)

In our house there was no precise pecking order about who would get the mail from the box, but I think I had my turn more often than the others. I must confess I was somewhat jealous of Dad for always receiving so many letters, and so on one of my trips from the mailbox I opened one of them. I did not remove the contents, but I certainly tore the envelope. My action was not premeditated but impulsive. I suddenly decided that it was unfair for one person in the household to be unduly singled out for importance. After I had torn the envelope, I reasoned that my chances of being exposed were minimal because the only suspect would surely be the mailman.

That night I slept as soundly as the cat behind the kitchen stove. At the next day's breakfast, however, Dad solemnly announced, "I'll have to meet the mailman by the box today. He has opened one of my letters, a deed you might expect in Communist Russia but not here in Canada."

"Are you sure he did it?", asked Mother.

"Of course, no one else would even think of it."

That last comment did it, and I confessed my transgression. Sadly, the punishment exceeded the crime. I was forbidden to get the mail for an entire month. (I wished that Grandmother would have been alive. She would have negotiated a less severe sentence for me.)

While I served my time, I spent more hours on other activities; for example, I went out with my one-wheeler more often, a home-made, wooden contraption shaped like an upside-down T, which pushed a steel rim about a foot in diameter.

About a week after my sentence had expired, I went to the mailbox and found a letter addressed to me. I knew it was for me because the address was clearly printed, and I was a good reader.

I took it inside and had my Mom open it. The letter, Mom said, was from Aunt Anna in Waterloo. Unfortunately the letter was written in German, and so Mom had to read it to me. For some reason Aunt Anna wanted to tell me that her family had bought a house on Caroline Street. Then she went on to say what the house looked like.

I was not that much interested in the letter's content, but I was thrilled that some one had without prompting singled me out for some attention.

The rural mailbox still holds a fascination even though my own children have left home to establish their own households and mail routines. Of the letters I receive some evoke a smile and some a frown, but one of the best letters I have received was from Aunt Anna. It etched my identity in indelible ink.

painting the mailbox

i painted the mailbox to-day
black
and besmudged my name
and besmirched the flag

i should have been more cautious
about denigrating
my prospects
my integrity
my patriotism

will passers-by understand

Mr. Reinhardt

When we moved to the farm east of Leamington, we obtained our water from three sources: a dug well, which also served as a refrigerator; a basement cistern into which rain water from the roof was piped (rain water was used mainly for hair washing); and Sturgeon Creek. To draw water from the latter we had a piston pump in the basement.

Piston pumps were new to Dad; in fact, anything related to machines was near the bottom of Dad's gifts along with his management of farm animals and so when repairs were required, Dad summoned Mr. Reinhardt. My Dad belonged to the old boys' school of loyalties - hire a person that goes to your church, let him be German speaking, and ensure that he is a fellow immigrant. Mr. Reinhardt fit all of the categories as far as Dad was concerned.

I am almost certain, though, that he was not a church member, that he attended irregularly, and that he was not a Russian Mennonite. He wore thick-lensed glasses that gave him a weird appearance. When he worked, he was usually humming and that led me to believe he was likely a good singer. His two girls attended our Sunday school but again not on a regular basis.

Mr. Reinhardt was a deliberate individual, very personable, and allegedly given to timing his appearances just before mealtime, but I cannot confirm the latter. My uncle gossiped that Mr. Reinhardt spent as much time chatting as working and therefore it was better to abandon him as soon as the problem was explained to him.

The next time our pump broke down, Dad called Mr. Reinhardt again, and coincidentally the job was done just before our mealtime. Dad thought it inhospitable not to invite our plumber. He graciously accepted our invitation and began humming again. Mother had made a simple but nutritious meal climaxed by a panful of *Stollen* (pastry filled with fruit), fresh out of the oven.

At the beginning of the meal, our family had its usual ritual of singing a hymn followed by a table grace. Thus through the years we had come to know virtually every German hymn that was ever written. We tried to sing in four-part harmony, but with Mom and Dad and three boys this was an almost insurmountable challenge. (My sisters had married and left home.)

I don't know what possessed Dad on this occasion. Did he have a senior's moment? Was it his sense of humour? I do not think that he was out to embarrass his guest. At any

rate, Dad suggested we sing *Seelenbräutigam* (the soul's Bridegroom). Turning to Mr. Reinhardt, Dad asked if this song was familiar to him. The plumber nodded expansively as if he hummed it every day and knew all the ten stanzas from memory. At that moment I noticed a twinkle in Dad's eye.

The singing began, and we were all impressed with the plumber's resonant voice on the first word of the hymn. Then the voice died. Dad stopped the singing and empathizing with Mr. Reinhardt suggested we begin again. Perhaps there had been a frog in our guest's throat. This time Dad recited the entire first line. We began again and we were all impressed with the plumber's melodious voice on the first line of the hymn. Then his melodious voice died and we continued singing on our own.

It would be more accurate to say that we staggered to the end. By line three I was giggling, and then contagion set in. It is fair to report that by the end of the song only Mom and Dad were still singing. The table grace followed, but I have no idea what Dad was thankful for.

What saved the occasion, as had happened so many times before, was Mom's *Stollen*. The plumber ate the first part of his meal self-consciously, but when he saw Mom bring in her piping hot, heavenly dessert, his demeanour changed and he like a robotic arm reached across and clutched three, knowing that *Stollen* have a very limited shelf life.

At the end of the meal, we got up, Mr. Reinhardt thanked Mom for her *Stollen*, and told Dad there would be no charge for the plumbing work.

We who had been boors at the table feared, however, that this was not the end of the story. We expected and deserved retribution. The aftermath was inconclusive as sometimes happens. Dad's method of disciplining was the silent method. He knew that we knew we had been ill-mannered children, and so there was no need for a hue and cry. Perhaps he felt some responsibility himself for what had gone wrong, but an appropriate guilt was necessary, a positive feeling that conduct would be improved.

I sometimes wonder what happened to our plumber in the months and years following his visit. I believe our pump had been repaired so well that it never needed a plumber's attention again. Honest labour bears a lovely face.

In conclusion I should report that this giggling incident or a similar one never repeated itself in our house.

Teaching Dad English

When Dad became the pastor of his church in the early 1930s, he realized even then that sooner or later he would have to interact with the Anglo-Saxon community around him, even if only on a basic level. In Essex County there was no such concept of a single solitude for Mennonites as there might have been for Mennonites in Ukraine. Furthermore, there was no regulated and organized assistance, as there is to-day, to encourage immigrants in the language of the land: no ESL, no special evening classes, etc. Indeed, to some extent the community was content to let the immigrants wallow in the immigrant ghetto. If they crawled out of it, they would have to do so by their own labour and ingenuity, single-handedly.

And so I became an English teacher at a very early age. My qualifications were that I had a grade four education and counting. Sometimes after a meal Dad would say, "Well, Jacob, it's time for my lesson!" Our text was Aesop's fables, fables that Dad loved, for I think they reminded him of some of the faith convictions of the Hebrew people as seen in their myths. (I use the word in the literary sense.)

Dad's comprehension was actually quite good, but it lacked correct expression, something that would always trip him up in public. His absolute favourite piece was "Androcles and the Lion".

"Een the great city of RRome, dere leeved many many years ago a purr slav name Androklees. Very terrible tings he suffered at da hands of his krool masta, until unable to beer it eny longa, he rran away and hid in da forres dat lay beyon the sity. Butt little could he find to eat in da voods, and he at last krrept into a kav to die. He feel into a deep sleep, but vas avakend by da rror of a lion vich vas limpin and in grreat payn.

"Androklees saw dat dere vas a torn in the lion's pa. Dough much afraid he tuk da pa in heez hands and vit a queck pool, droo out de torn. Rright avay de payn vas gon. Da lion leeked Androklees' hand, rrubed hees hed aganst him, and lay don at hees feet. Dat night lion and slav slept sid by sid.

After quite a few readings I found a reason why Dad was drawn to the Androcles story. Dad too had been a slave to an oppressive government back in Ukraine. He and his contemporaries had suffered cruelly the ravages of homelessness, famine, indignities, but after a self-imposed exile (emigration), he was attempting to put his life together again.

As Dad's language improved along with his skills (he never lost his accent) he became

dictionary user-friendly by playing games with me. He would check the meaning of a word in the dictionary, and then would ask, "Now, Jacob, what do you think this word means?" I gave him my best definition.

"Well, I think the word means this, but let's check the dictionary to be sure." The definition, of course, was exactly as he had predicted. It took me a while to get on to his game, but I see now that it was a confidence builder for him and I have never regarded his act as duplicitous.

Eventually he graduated to the daily Windsor newspaper, which we received a day late from our good neighbours. By now, reading aloud to me was altogether too deliberate.

Dad never preached a sermon in English, but I distinctly remember the first time he read the biblical text in his new language. It was a text related to the Christmas season, and the response was altogether affirming. All I could see was Androcles.

When King George VI died in 1952, an ecumenical memorial service was conducted in the United Church in Leamington. Schools were closed in honour of the late King, and so I attended the service. Dad, having been asked to speak the closing prayer, was up on the podium. It was just the kind of assignment that he could fulfil - a short response, reasonably well read.

And so like Androcles, Dad had come full circle. He was interacting with Anglo-Saxons, he was communicating publicly in their language, and was respected during the rest of his life in his own community and the community at large.

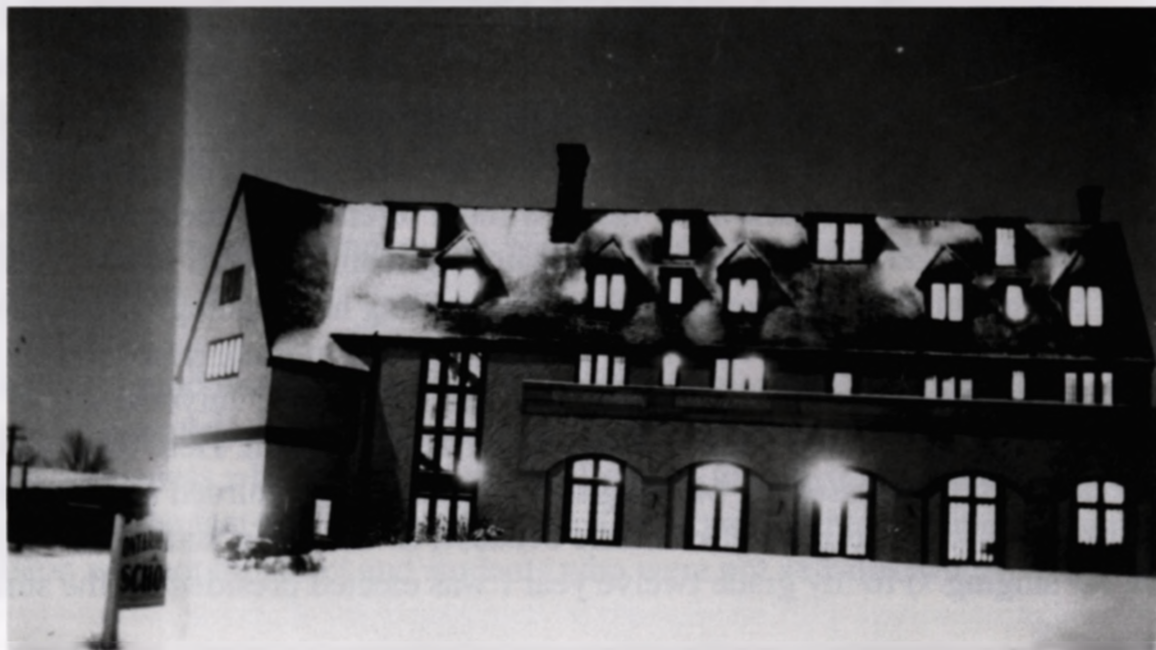
Spook
(a farm dog)

Old and arthritic he leans against
his masters knee otherwise would
thump over like a felled hog when i
approach no barking no tail wagging
no jumping up in greeting for some moments
his plaintive eyes measure me perhaps
hoping i am a medicine-man a masseur
some miracle worker at most to right
his misery but he never enquires
and that gladdens me for i would
only disappoint i marvel how he
controls his feelings and passions
no sound against the dying of
the light

Who cultivates tomatoes still his Eden keeps
Perennial pleasures plants and bountiful harvest reaps

PART IV

NIAGARA CHRISTIAN COLLEGIATE
(formerly Ontario Bible School)



Leaving Home

On September 12, 1943, I left Leamington for a new adventure in education. Actually there were twelve of us, all boys, all Mennonites from Leamington and vicinity, all in search of an alternative educational experience. (About a third of the Leamington contingent dropped out before Christmas for a variety of reasons.)

We were heading for a private school advertised as the school with the Christian atmosphere, situated on the scenic banks of the Niagara River, about half way between Fort Erie and Niagara Falls. This school, owned and operated by the Brethren in Christ Conference, one of the historic peace conferences in Ontario, had already functioned since the early 1930s, and when my Dad heard about it at a province-wide ministers' meeting he attended, he was eager that I enroll there. A meeting was arranged between him, Rev. John Wichert of Vineland, and the school board, and an amicable agreement was reached with this interesting proviso - Bible courses for Mennonite students were to be taught in the German language.

Our group of five students was packed into Jake Dirksen's big Buick and left Leamington in the early morning darkness. When we reached Delhi, the tobacco farmers were already stirring in their fields, dutifully harvesting their crops. We noticed the primers, soaked in dew, bending forward like whipped and condemned criminals, moving along the tobacco rows. It was a job I had escaped from, and I could empathize with their hurts.

We arrived at the school, to-day known as Niagara Christian Collegiate, at lunch time. Jake unloaded our baggage on the back steps and headed for home to join the navy, as he had told us he would along the way. At any rate, at that moment an experience began for me which I shall always remember and for which I shall always be grateful.

I realize now that the school was a generation ahead of its time in educational theory and practice. For the first time in my high school life my sense of self-worth and self-esteem improved. The teachers actually knew my name without reference to the seating plan. I was no longer tormented by the downstairs-upstairs regimen. I walked to my classes like a human being, not like the disenfranchised single-filing to the gulag. The burden of being stigmatized as an immigrant was lifted forever, and that attitude raised my spirits. In my former school there had been the mantra that teachers were a universe above their students, and so there was a frigid disconnection between them. Here there was interaction outside of the classroom. My singing voice suddenly returned and I joined the school choir. (I had failed grade nine music because, as the report stated, "He has no enthusiasm for singing.") In my grade twelve year I was elected president of the student

assembly, a position that would have been difficult to attain at Leamington. I would have been a spectator with nose pressed up against the glass.

Another big change unheard of at the time was that the student, not the curriculum, was the *raison d'être* for a school's existence. In the 1940s and far beyond, the Ontario Department of Education decreed what every student in the province would be studying at a particular time. (An overstated comment was that in the first week of February every grade thirteen student in the province would be studying the third act of a Shakespearean play.) In other words, there was no consideration given to demographics, etc. My experience was that teachers "covered the course" regardless of how that was achieved. At NCC teachers went out of their way to make a lesson interesting instead of plodding along and ticking off the topics as they were "covered". In English, for example, we dramatized scenes from Shakespeare in front of the class so that the script became a living document instead of only a study in vocabulary. We had class debates on topics that arose from literary themes; for instance, which is more important in a character's development - heredity or environment. Most importantly, memorization was secondary to creative thinking and understanding, and when a "purple passage" had to be memorized, it had to be understood first. Of course, we still had to memorize one hundred and fifty lines per year as prescribed by the Department. In fact, writing out a passage from memory was always the first question on the English Departmental examination.

Service in the community was not a requirement for graduation. Nonetheless, it happened because serving others was part of the school's mission statement. When I was in grade eleven, a call came to the school requesting a singing group travel to the boondocks and serve at a funeral. It was a type of funeral I was not used to, but we performed a service and felt better for it.

Field trips were a part of the curriculum long before the practice was in general use and abuse. Most of our trips were not extravagant but no-frill excursions to historic places in the Niagara region. Old Fort Erie was often our destination. Our longest trip was to Pennsylvania by train for the purpose of touring the capital. The reason for that destination was that our supervisor had a brother there, who supplied us with accommodation gratis. Our choir trips took us to more distant places in Ontario.

Independent study was in common use. Since I was the only student in grade 13 German, I studied largely on my own.

In summary, I found that my education had been more of an experience than a set of courses to be completed, more of an approach rather than a body of facts. It cultivated a sense of wholeness which includes the intellectual, the spiritual, and the personal, and recognized the fact that relationships are a large part of the educational journey. Supervision was not too strict and students who were not self-disciplined and

self-motivated had an uneasy time adjusting. Tough love was not part of the mission statement.

Some of those that were with me maintain today that the school lacked high academic standards. I disagree with that opinion. I received all of my grade 13 credits, including top marks in German. (I still wonder if the examiners in Toronto could even read my Gothic letters and in frustration simply gave me a perfect.)

My education at NCC prepared me well for life, and really that is what education is all about. Leaving home was a good move.

The conversion was initiated by a heightened sensitiveness of sin followed by a glorious freedom after the burden of sin was lifted. I noticed that an able evangelist aided by songs rich in appealing imagery could awaken in his audience a dreadful feeling of having done wrong and the consequent desperate need for forgiveness of those wrongs. Almost invariably the song chosen was "Just As I Am" and to a lesser degree "I'm Coming Home."

An exuberant sense of gratitude and peace followed the sin-forgiveness syndrome resulting in a strong desire to give a public testimony of the transformation from "being lost" to being "saved". A singing group might affirm the transformation with "There's A New Name Written Down In Glory."

A rather restrictive rigid code (lifestyle) followed the new life, related to Sunday ice-skating, wearing of jewelry and make-up, dress code, etc. A further reward of the new life was the gift and ritual of speaking in tongues, but only a very few reached this pinnacle. I stayed out of that issue entirely because I was skeptical of it and had nothing to contribute to the discussion.

Every Thursday evening was prayer meeting, an event I looked forward to because it meant a decrease in home-work assignments for Friday. My first Thursday was an eye-peeling event that will linger in my consciousness forever. The homily was traditional, but the testimonies that followed inspired awe and wonder. I marvelled at the confidence and eloquence of the speakers and knew that neither I nor my fellows could ever reach that high standard of articulation, and so when some one in my group from Leamington volunteered a testimony I was both relieved because we were actually participants now but also embarrassed because I sensed a dismal imminent disaster. I can still quote the testimony virtually verbatim:

> My mother lost her box of matches
> required to light the coal-oil lamp.
> She prayed that she would find
> it. Her prayer was answered all right
> but inside the box she found a mouse
> that almost made her faint with shock.

The merciful worship leader nearly lost his earnest composure but controlled it long enough to thank the speaker for his unusual testimony.

I think I adjusted well to my new religious environment even though I ventured only one testimony on which I gave myself a failing grade. (Brevity and sincerity I generally assumed were not highly valued.) However I participated in a street meeting in town, distributed tracts at times, and sang in various musical groups.

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To NCC's credit, my faith and culture were never condemned or ridiculed as deficient or inferior. They never targeted me for aggressive predatory tactics. (Those came from other sources within the school.) At no time did I feel confined or bound in by the school's administration or policies, and had my education stopped there I probably would have become a life-long advocate of what the school stood for and sought to attain.

It was at the university where I hit the slough of paradox when I realized that the literalism of the fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible was no longer tenable in explaining Earth's origin, etc. Courses in philosophy of religion, geological science, ancient literature demanded alternative methods to show that the old truisms were dynamic enough to permit further interpretations.

The preceding perspective occurred as a deliberate and serene development, not abrupt and traumatic as, for instance, Karen Armstrong's metamorphosis from devout Catholic to firm secularist as described in her book *The Spiral Staircase*. Finally, I respect NCC for providing me with an excellent grounding in the Bible, a grounding that gave me an advantage in the study of literature. Who, for example, can study Milton without some knowledge of the Scriptures, or T.S. Eliot for that matter? Again, from all aspects NCC was good for me.

The staff
1943-44

Left to right: Mr. Elmer Steckley, principal; Rev. John Wichert; Miss Phyllis Sherk; Miss Ruth Zook; Mr. George Dyck; Mr. Arthur Pye.
Note: Miss Dorothy Sherk (below) was not on staff on my first enrolment.

Mr. George Dyck

I still see him clearly - embarrassed and abashed coming down the steps and into the basement cafeteria as insecure as a first-sermon preacher. Fortunately, the faculty table was just off to his left at the bottom of the stairs; so unless you were looking in that direction, you would have missed him. I was one of the few that noticed him, and that observation was my introduction to Mr. Dyck.

It was the day before classes began, and he, like us Leamingtonites, was late for lunch because locating the cafeteria was like an Easter egg hunt - difficult to find but rewarding when you finally took the taste test. First you walked through the vestibule, then the chapel, then a small office, and finally down the steps.

Mr. Dyck was in many ways a perfect fit for the student body. He had served a stint as a conscientious objector, and therefore his peace position was in harmony with the mission statement of the school. He was a recent graduate of Ontario Agricultural College in Guelph, and thus was capable of teaching the science courses. He was a member in good standing in the Mennonite Brethren Conference, a faith well represented in the school body, and finally he was youthful, handsome, and clothes conscious.

Unfortunately, the teaching facilities were marked with privation. Lab equipment could have been stored in an oversized medicine cabinet. Hence he conducted chemistry experiments on his own desk while we students observed. Hands-on experience was minimal and so we watched with fascination what occurred on his desk. One advantage of this method was that there were few mishaps and the results were usually what Mr. Dyck had anticipated. Class time was also conserved, giving us more opportunity to do our written chemistry problems in class. Yet he never complained about his austere workplace but patiently soldiered on.

Science was his specialty, but he also was obliged to teach a potpourri of other subjects, including book-keeping, math, and phys. education. Years later I too found myself teaching a medley of courses when I was hired as English teacher at UMEI. My add-ons were geography, history, phys. education, and art. Beyond his teaching duties, Mr. Dyck was also a chapel speaker, but his reserve made him uncomfortable behind a podium. Then he took his turn supervising the study hall in the evening and periodically took charge of a section of the dormitory. Although he had a melodious voice, he never participated in the school choir as did his compatriot, Miss Phyllis Sherk. Occasionally, however, he lent his second tenor to our male quartet when our regular was absent.

Many years later when I too was in the overload mode, I could get away from school and relax at home. Mr. Dyck did not have that escape because he roomed with Mr. Wichert,

the German and religion teacher. There in his roomette he did his marking and lesson preparation. (Actually, Johanna, Mr. Dyck's widow, informed me recently that they were married on September 8, 1945, and lived in Niagara Falls so that in Mr. Dyck's third and last year at the school he too enjoyed respite at the end of the school day.)

One day, in the fall of 1945, coming into his Grade 13 chemistry class, we saw a charming young lady sitting on a chair several feet behind my regular place. My first thought was that she had to be the district inspector and that we'd better be up to snuff in our work. On the other hand, district inspectors, I had learned in public school, were not given to smiling, but this young lady had a smile that glowed with friendliness and comeliness. I thought surely Mr. Dyck would introduce her to the class and put us all at ease, but nothing happened and we almost forgot about her. Well, not quite almost. I thought it inappropriate not to introduce a stranger, and so I steeled my courage and at the suitable moment I asked, "Mr. Dyck, would you please introduce the lady behind us?"

"Yes, class, that is my new wife. I should have acknowledged her earlier." I thought it a fine gesture that he should bring his wife to class and show her his workplace. I have never heard of a similar circumstance, and I'm sure my principals would not have allowed it.

Mr. Dyck had only one character flaw as a teacher and that was his gentle nature - we were young, energetic students expected to be self-disciplined and self-assured, but when we fell short of expectations, he never gave us a withering glare, a raised voice, or a reprimand. I once overheard him saying to a colleague, "The evangelistic services will do wonders in straightening out these students." I am still wondering if that attitude is an abuse of religion.

After the Departmentals in June of 1946, our paths diverged. I'm told that he went to the Ontario College of Education, and I crossed the border to continue my education.

In the summer of '46 I briefly considered chemistry as a major, but then opted for English so that I could experiment with words. I had had an excellent English teacher at Niagara, and my English professors turned out to be pre-eminent. English was the right choice for me.

I learned from Johanna Dyck that her late husband had taught in various schools, gradually changing his specialty from science to commercial. He taught for thirty-six years including the three at Niagara Christian. He died of cancer at the age of eighty-six.

Going Home
Entering he treads lightly
Motions with his hand
Transports us on eagle wings
Home to Canaan land

My Favourite Teacher

Once in a while, I see a few of my Leamington contemporaries from the heady school days of the early 1940s. Sadly, many have passed on and others have established homes and vocations elsewhere.

Recently, Don Gillan of Don's Appliances was over to measure the space for our new dishwasher. Don and I were in the same year at Leamington High School and our conversation inevitably turned to the good ol' days, or was it the bad ol' days, depending on one's perspective. I believe we agreed that we had been served an education on a platter of ruthless discipline.

To meet the ideal teacher then, I had to leave Leamington and complete my high school education at Niagara Christian Collegiate. Here I encountered a very ordinary-looking lady with her hair combed straight back and coiffured. She cared less about appearance than getting students all fired up about "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." (Actually, my first encounter with her was in the library when she volunteered to help me find a book. I couldn't believe that teachers were so benevolent.) Her classroom was a place where students found understanding and encouragement.

Miss Dorothy Sherk lived in a single room that also served as her kitchen. I think she could have eaten in the cafeteria like the rest of the staff members, but I heard from others that she required a special diet. On one occasion when she knew that she would have to be absent from classes all day, she asked me to teach her Grade Eleven class, an experience I found rewarding and may have been a factor in choosing my own vocation. When I went to her room for instructions, and she opened the door, I was astonished at her spare and spartan living quarters. Here was one person who had her priorities clearly in order.

Periodically she came down into the vestibule and played the piano while some students gathered around and sang. I presume she could sing, though I never heard her. On one occasion, she accompanied us on a sleigh ride into Fort Erie and although she interacted with us, we knew there would be no nonsense on board. So far as I know, she had no car, so I have no idea how she spent her weekends, probably in her room preparing lessons. The only minus mark I can give her is that some of her counselling was too intrusive, but I know she wanted the best for us.

On the basis of having been in her class and from my own years of experience as an English teacher, I have formulated an ultimate aim for the study of literature:

The study of literature is that act by which the student (sometimes with the aid of the teacher) enters into the frame of mind of the successful creative writer. That frame of mind is the soul of every worthwhile writing, no matter what the genre. Everyone knows it is easy to read without getting below the surface of a book. Teaching above the surface is the place where poor English teachers teach: vocabulary study, reading between the lines, etc. But a genuine study enables a student to enter into communication with the great minds and great imaginations of humankind - not that the process will ever be perfect, but as near to perfection as a non-artist can get. The study of literature involves a mental process as coherent and progressive as the study of science.

Said in another way, a student or any reader is touched by a work of art only as he enters into it and tries to comprehend it sympathetically. The good literature teacher points the way, but the student must experience the journey for himself.

After my graduation from Grade Thirteen, I have seen Miss Sherk on two occasions. The first was in Toronto when we were both marking English Departmentals. She asked me if we could have dinner together and of course I agreed. The occasion seemed rather strange. First, I too was an English teacher now, having taught the same English curriculum as she; second, we were now equals pursuing the same ends.

The second meeting was the fiftieth anniversary of my graduation. I introduced my wife to her with, "Margaret, this is Miss Dorothy Sherk, best English teacher in Ontario." I hear via the scuttlebutt that the fall of 2005 will mark her ninetieth birthday. She deserves to live a long life, but she probably would counter that it's not the years in your life that count as much as the life in those years.

Teaching is a wonderful profession with only one frustration; namely, one never knows the full results in any kind of ultimate sense, and so I am acknowledging Miss Sherk's good teaching was not lost on me.

Mr. Wichert

I mentioned before that when the NCC board agreed to accept Mennonite students into their school, it was gracious enough to affirm that religious courses for Mennonite students would be taught in German. Mr. John Wichert was the one hired to implement this proviso.

He was a congenial person, well liked and knowledgeable. If he had a fault, it was that his disposition was too mild, a quality that is sometimes a hindrance when dealing with unruly and rambunctious young people. He had been a teacher, I believe, in Ukraine, and so some of his attitudes were rooted in the Old World. He was, for example, a stickler for memorization, even more so than required by the Department of Education. For instance, we memorized a good part of *Das Lied von der Glocke*, ("The Song of the Bell"), without having a clear idea of its meaning.

But it never occurred to us to initiate him. I say this because when I began as a teacher, my neighbour at home told me that as a youth in the village of Nikolaipol he had helped to initiate the new teacher by setting him on top of the stove. (I digress.)

When we arrived at the school in September of 1943, we were somewhat nonplussed by the fact that the fourth floor accommodations were not ready for us; in fact, they would not be ready until well into the month of November. In the interim, we were to be accommodated at the Miller cabins, a short distance from the school. Mr. Wichert received the task of supervising the complex of seven individual cabins each housing four students. To ensure that supervision would be thorough, he lived by himself in one of them.

One cabin was cloned after the other and the whole complex was laid out in the form of a U with the open end facing the boulevard. Each cabin had just enough room for two double beds, a washstand with running water, and an entrance space the size of a boot tray. The toilet for them all was a two-holer behind the Miller garage. Suitcases had to be stored underneath the bed, except for the large trunk which was too high to hide.

The cabin that my group chose was right at the top of the U, next to the Wichert cabin. My group consisted of two *Schoenfelder* and two *Tiegenhagener*: Bill Dick and I, and Art Rempel and Fred Willms, respectively.

The main educational drawback at NCC was that it had a weak athletic programme, partly because the school did not have an athletic tradition and partly because interests lay elsewhere, such as music. Consequently, some students looked for their own ways

to expend their energies. These ways were always creative and engaging. Ironically, Mr. Wichert was also our phys. ed. teacher, but when his Old World exercises were belittled, he seconded several senior students that had some experience in physical training in public and high school programmes.

Several nights after our arrival at the cabins, the occupants of our abode decided to have a house-warming party amongst ourselves in the tradition of *Oppa Forstei*. Pizza had not yet been created and pop was too expensive. We therefore celebrated without food by doing headstands on the beds, using pillows as projectiles, etc. We were ready for a water skirmish when we heard a knock on the door.

"Is the rumpus coming from here?" (No response.)

"I said is the rumpus coming from here?" (A long pause when we recognized Mr. Wichert's voice.)

"We were all fast asleep!" was the reply in unison. We rationalized that indeed we had been asleep, but that was the night before.

About a month after the headstand episode, we returned after dark to our cabin, having worked late in study hall on *Das Lied von der Glocke*. As we crossed the cabin grounds, we walked by Mr. Wichert's '36 Chev parked beside his cabin. A mischievous inspiration struck us all at the same time. Three of us lifted the back bumper of his car, while the fourth put blocks under the rear axle so that the back wheels were barely above the ground. Then retreating to our own cabin, we knew that nothing would happen until the next morning.

Early the next day, we heard an intermittent but agonizing and ungodly revving and groaning of a car engine, a sound that did not diminish, leading us to believe that the car was not moving. Shortly after the sound had died, there was a knock at the door, and when we answered, there was Mr. Wichert.

"Would you fellows mind doing me a favour? Some *Tore* (idiots) have blocked my car and it won't move. Perhaps you could help."

We graciously consented to help, a bit puzzled though that he had come to *our* cabin door. All in all, he took the prank with good humour and was his usual congenial self in class that day.

In religion classes he was at his best and we pumped him hard for answers to questions that nagged us.

"Why are religion classes conducted in German?"

"Why do men and women in the worship service sit apart from one another?"

"Why is fighting a just war wrong?" (World War II was still raging.)
Mr. Wichert resigned at the end of the year to become the *Aeltester* of the Vineland United Mennonite Church, but despite his having served only one year, he left a notable influence. First, his kind and diplomatic nature healed over potential rifts between the Mennonites and the Brethren in Christ. Secondly, his having been exposed to a strong evangelical presence in the NCC setting had a long-term salutary effect on the General Conference Mennonites in Ontario. Thirdly, his example of teaching the Scriptures as well as living their message almost led me to the ministry myself. Fourthly, in the summer of 1944, my home community called a meeting to determine whether a private high school was feasible in Leamington. Mr. Wichert was invited to be the guest speaker.

For one of the meals between gatherings, Dad invited Mr. Wichert to our home. When he arrived, we of course recognized each other immediately. During a lull in the conversation, Mr. Wichert quietly observed, "Teachers are sometimes assigned almost impossible jobs. Last fall I was asked to supervise some students in a cabin complex…" Then he looked towards me and seeing my pleading look continued, "but time smooths and soothes everything."

Mr. Wichert had had the last word and the last chuckle.

The Turkey

The partly deaf girl
in the grade nine art class
misheard the final exam instruction
and drew a turkey
not a turtle
and predictably
bombed the course

Curriculum is strictly set
each jot and tittle must be met
verbatim is the epithet
no need to whine and weep and fret

What did you say - eh
repeat the course next year, you may
for now knuckle under and obey

Hitch-hiking Home For The Holidays

The time was December 18, 1944, on a Friday afternoon. The Christmas examinations were almost over and my grade 12 classmate, Rudy Rempel, and I had earlier decided that as soon as the exams were finished, we were heading home to Leamington.

We were not home-sick, only hungry for familiar food such as *Zuckerzwieback* (sugar-buns), *Platz* (fruit-topped pastry), and my all-time favourite, *Stollen*. We could have taken the train, I suppose, but trains cost money, and then there was the inconvenience of poor connections. Thus foolishly we decided to hitch-hike after the English exam was over.

It is important to remember that 1944 was a war year, the significance being that fuel and tires were rationed. Consequently, few vehicles were on the road, highways were minimally cleared of snow; indeed, patriotism demanded that Canadians stay at home, a small sacrifice in contrast to the dreadful sacrifices that the boys were making overseas - at least that was what Canadians were told. (I shall return to the issue of roads and patriotism in a subsequent narrative.)

We took the bus to Fort Erie, and then walked straight to Canada Customs at the foot of the Peace Bridge. Our hope was that a compassionate customs officer would arrange a ride for us with someone travelling from Buffalo to Detroit. Surely, such a traveller would be driving through Leamington. We knew that simply standing beside the road would be utterly futile.

We soon found the type of officer we were looking for, one who looked as though he loved his children and would do anything to protect them. Fairly soon he had a ride for us with a gentleman going to Sarnia, not Detroit. It wasn't exactly what we wanted, but we couldn't be selective. Besides, perhaps we could persuade him to take the picturesque and historical route through Leamington. I had been successful with that ploy on a previous occasion with a different driver.

The heater was defective in our driver's car, or else it was meant not to distribute heat to the back seat, and so the three of us huddled in the front seat. We talked little because the driver had to concentrate on keeping his car on the highway. We did determine that he was a salesman, but never discovered what his product was. Nowadays that would be a matter of great concern.

We bulldozed through snowbanks and followed the ruts, but surprisingly never got stuck. When the road was bumpy because of packed snow, our heads swayed side to side in smooth rhythm. Meanwhile, darkness had set in hours ago.

Eventually we reached Talbotville, and I knew instinctively that the scenic option through Leamington was out. One can request only so much of even good people. This man was going straight north to Sarnia.

He dropped us off at the four corners of Talbotville without saying a word - we unenthusiastically thanked him and found ourselves on our own again. Talbotville was as dead as a cemetery with one forty watt street lamp.

We had no alternative but to start walking west to Leamington guided by the stars. The air was solemnly still, the moon in near fullness and unusually bright, and with the snow on the ground we barely knew it was night. But the temperature was bitterly cold.

We encountered only one vehicle that night. It stopped and picked us up and drove us a short distance west. The driver explained that he had gone to St. Thomas to fetch some medicine for his ailing wife. He did not offer to take us in, and I was too civil to ask, aware he had his own problems. Perhaps his wife was expecting a baby and we had no gift to bring.

When we reached the head of his lane, he let us off and, warmed up a bit, we continued walking. Finally, after what seemed a marathon tramp (we didn't have a watch), we trudged into the dimly-lit hamlet of Shedden, where I said to Rud, "Just past the light on our right there is a small church", and then half-jokingly, "if we become members in spirit, we surely would have some claim to seek shelter there for the night."

"What would your Dad say to that?"

"Listen, Rud, leave Dad out of this. He's sleeping in a warm bed, we're not! Follow me!"

I went up to the church door, tried the latch, and pulled gently. The door opened, we stepped inside, and groped our way to a pew. Having found it, we slipped in, and almost instantly fell asleep; at least I did.

Soon after, I was visited by the most terrible nightmare I've ever had.

I dreamt that I had entered a strange church, completely packed, except for one empty chair at the back on which I seated myself. Then I waited and waited for the service to begin, but nothing happened. Surprisingly, the people were like robots. They didn't whisper, didn't fidget, didn't yawn, not even frown that nothing was happening. Finally, someone mechanically arose (I presumed it was the chair of the church council) and in a monotone announced, "Because of the extreme temperature, the pastor's radiator is frozen, and hence will not be coming to-night. Fortunately we have a guest preacher in

our midst, the one at the back, wearing the green toque. I am pleased to call on him now to deliver the evening sermon."

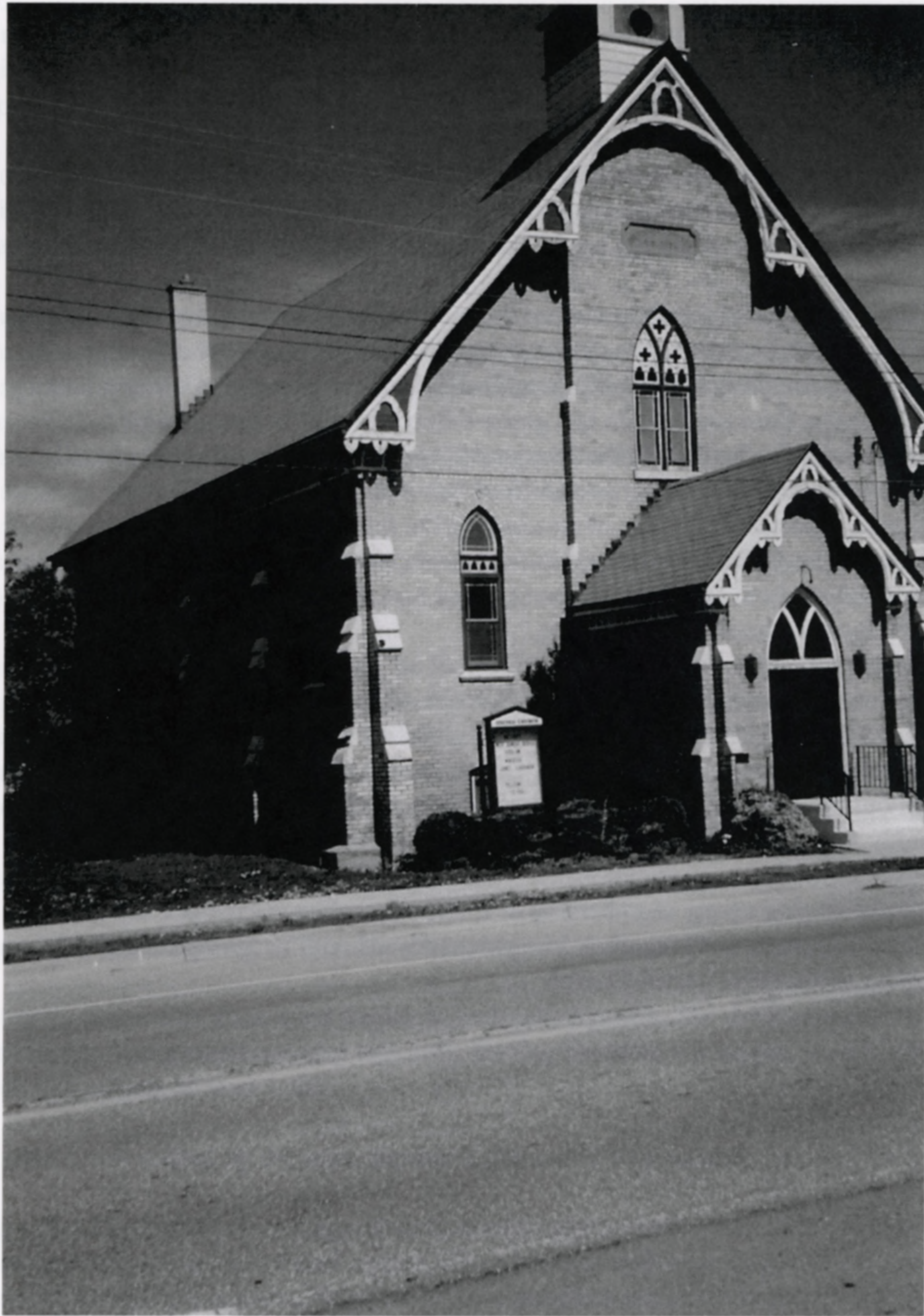
I got up very slowly and shuffled my feet forward, desperate for a text, any text. Nobody looked at me while I was moving down the aisle. I was almost even with the front pew and still no text. A little beyond the front pew I heard a small voice that sounded authentic, "Preach about foxes having burrows, birds of the air having nests, but the son of man having nowhere to lay his head."

When I had lifted one leg ready to mount the pulpit steps, I froze in my track, a paralysis of sorts, but before I could feel foolish and embarrassed, a female robot got up and shrieked, "This church is bone-chilling cold, and the guest preacher ain't no more a preacher than is a farm rooster. He is a green-toqued fraud. I'm going home to have some hot chocolate and *Stollen*." With that she started to leave and the other robots followed. When they were gone, the paralysis vanished.

When I awoke, I could see the dawn filtering through the east windows. Rud was already on his feet and ready to soldier on. When I asked him if he had liked my sermon, he replied, "You must have been dreaming."

We cancelled our membership and stepped outside. The only sound we heard was the purr of the Greyhound bus going by and the sight of its taillights off to the right, heading home to Leamington. We were not overly disappointed because every missed bus was money in our pockets, and so we continued walking and thumbing until we reached home on Saturday afternoon. *Stollen* and hot chocolate have never tasted so good since.

If I ever have to give up my membership at LUMC for whatever reason, say for singing too loud in the congregation, I know exactly where I'm going - to rekindle my membership at Shedden United Church.



Shedden United Church
as seen in 2006

Rudy Rempel and Jake Driedger

on their graduation from Grade 12, Spring, 1945

Hugo

In my first year as a student at NCC, Hugo and I knew each other, but no one would have said we were close friends. He was in a higher grade and several years older than I, and therefore was already more confident and self-assured in the presence of girls. He lived near St. Davids in the Niagara district, and so went home for week-ends. As I said, our relationship was neither close nor distant until one evening after study hall.

"Jake", he began, "I know a girl in St. Catharines that I would like to take roller skating this Saturday night. There is a big problem though - her parents won't allow it unless her sister comes along, and as you see I need a partner for the sister."

"But I never..."

"Really, all you have to do is show up, and I'll take care of everything else." (What he didn't say was that the sister was quite a good skater while I had cut my eye teeth at the Bob-Lo roller rink at the annual youth outing.)

I was in unfamiliar territory here. At Leamington High School close relationships between boys and girls rarely existed. Indeed at school proms, etc., the principal had set down rules for what contact on the dance floor would be tolerated and what would be disallowed. All of that of course made no difference to me, for I was not permitted to attend those social functions anyway because I might run into some unregenerate souls on the gym floor.

I never had had a date in my life. I had never even touched a woman other than my mother and grandmother, but in a moment of blind weakness I agreed to Hugo's request. He acted as though he had won a major lottery.

On Friday after school his father was waiting for us in one of the last new cars manufactured before industry was retooled into making war matériel. When we got to St. Davids, I discovered that our plans would have to be changed because Hugo's brother also needed the car on the same night, but he was willing to compromise with us; in other words, he would take us to St. Catharines and then we would have to find our own way home. The change didn't bother Hugo, who apparently did not mind what might happen after the roller skating. I discovered too that we would leave early for St. Catharines and have supper at the girls' home.

We arrived at the St. Catharines house in time for the meal. My partner seemed to be pleased with me despite my awkwardness and reserve. For my part, I was impressed with

her ease and social graces. I decided to confess right there that I was not a good roller-skater because Leamington had no rink and the Bob-Lo experience hardly counted.

For supper a lovely meal had been prepared for us with potato salad, my nemesis, as the centre piece, but since there was other delectable food I was partly successful in working around it.

After supper we made a short walk to the roller rink and stopped by the counter to pay the admission and rent for our skates. Then we had to stand in line and wait for some room to be available on the benches to clamp the skates onto our shoes. Suddenly I noticed that Hugo, who was to look after everything, had disappeared with his girlfriend. I had counted on him to be my role model in fastening the skates. For example, would my partner affix her own, or would I, or would we both work at it? I was on my own and functioning by sheer trial and error.

My first mistake was that I didn't wait for a vacant spot on the benches, but like a good Mennonite, I decided to improvise.

"If you'll let me take hold of your ankle, I could lift your foot and slide the shoe into the skate," I volunteered.

No response, which I interpreted as an affirmation, and so I clutched her ankle and began lifting, but her foot didn't move. Apparently her lack of response had meant a negation.

I next tried persuasion. "If we put on our skates while we are standing here, we won't need the benches and therefore will have more time on the floor."

"You put yours on first!"

That was easy because my foot knew exactly what I was thinking and so all elements were co-ordinated. In a short time I was standing tall on my skates.

"Now you may clamp mine."

The situation this time was different. I was standing taller, my feet were mobile, and when I went for her ankle I lost my balance and slipped down on my patootie.

"Why don't we just wait for a bench?" she observed, looking down on me, and those around agreed.

Once we were on the floor, it was apparent that I desperately needed her. I needed her like an old man needs a cane for steadiness; I needed her like an inexperienced pastor

needs a pulpit to lean on; like a drowning sailor reaching for the lifeline. We were too preoccupied to attempt a conversation.

The conclusion came sooner than expected. A rink supervisor tapped me on the shoulder and warned, "Either speed up or get off the floor." We were going our speed limit, but that was apparently too slow, and so we pulled off the road and spent the rest of the time on the bench.

Settled on the bench, I tried to initiate some dialogue.

"Do you like Latin?" I ventured.

"I don't take Latin."

Does your school have a glee club?"

"Yes, but I'm not in it. I don't sing."

Her efforts at making conversation were equally futile, and so we sat back and watched the skaters go in circles. The Hugos were part of the crowd and were scoring touchdowns and extra points.

At the end of the evening we returned the skates and walked the girls home. At the door, I said, "Ann, I had a wonderful time to-night. I shall remember this forever." Her sentiments were more charming.

Hugo and I walked to the Queen Elizabeth Way. Now that the event was over, Hugo was bereft of further plans, and so we just kept on walking. We did get a few short rides, thanks to the fact that Canada was at war, and picking up hitch-hikers was almost a patriotic duty. Most of the journey nonetheless was by shank's pony.

We reached Hugo's house far past midnight only to find the door locked, a practice ingrained into every Russian Mennonite family. We gained entrance, however, through a window, and with Hugo in the lead felt our way to the bedroom.

On Monday we were back in school again and Hugo never asked a favour of me again, mainly, I think, because he and his partner eventually decided not to travel the same road. When I heard the news, I wanted to leap up and celebrate as if I had won a lottery, but my feet were fastened to the floor because I suddenly realized that my roller skating days with Ann were over. I continued with my Latin and my singing in the glee club. I felt that I had not been a saint but that I had kept my agreement; that I had not promised more than I could perform.

Whipper Billy Watson

One winter, posters along main street in Fort Erie announced that Whipper Billy Watson, British Empire wrestling champion, was coming to town and would perform in the local arena. I had never seen a professional wrestling match, not even an amateur one, since high school wrestling was considered to be immodest in an age of prudery and moral strictness.

To attend the Fort Erie match, I had to consider the distance from school to town, the fact that the match was in the evening, and most importantly, getting a study hall exemption from the presiding supervisor.

But as the night of the match approached, my determination galvanized and I persuaded my two room-mates to go with me. Persuasion is probably too strong a word in the context. (I digress.) In any event we still needed a convincing alibi to be excused from study hall.

Here a quirk of fate was on our side, for on the day of the match we had fish purée for supper, a dish that was generally unwelcomed for it purportedly caused stomach cramps. And so, some minutes into study hall the three of us went to the supervisor and pleaded severe stomach cramps, a plea that was answered with, "Well, go to your room, lie down a bit, and return when you are feeling better." She had an unmistakable twinkle in her eye. Had she also read the poster as she walked by?

When we got to the boulevard, we were fortunate in getting a ride. After all, who would drive by three young lads going to a wrestling match? That an evil person might stop for us never even entered our minds.

The arena was packed with people, but before we entered we paid our admission, and then a red stamp was thumped on the back of our hand. Since there was no assigned seating, we made our way as close to the ring as possible.

There were two preliminary bouts, and it didn't take us long to discover that professional wrestling is a colossal fake. The big brutes were like a small nursery of childlike actors. We could see that the outcome had been predetermined, that the wrestlers were co-operating instead of competing, and that the participants seemed to be acting out characters. A slap to the face never squarely landed. It only sounded that way because the wrestlers slapped their hands while the viewers' attention was focused on their faces.

The story line set out feuds and rivalries; "good" characters and "bad" characters. In

a way, we were watching a morality play such as we are all familiar with in the Old Testament.

The main event was the breath stopper. Whipper Bill bore a close resemblance to Clark Gable, only taller and more muscular. Twice he escaped his ugly opponent by a clever hand-over-hand movement along the lowest rope, and then in a flying leap his body hit his opponent's chest, throwing him backwards, and Billy pinned his shoulders to the mat. We locked our eyes on Billy's sweet, sweating biceps, and then noticed not a strand of his black hair had moved during the bout.

This time the performance was more real. The moves the wrestlers made on each other, however, didn't hurt as badly as the wrestlers pretended, I'm sure, but there was more authenticity this time. They were good athletes performing difficult stunts. Since we were so close to the ring, we could hear the wrestlers whisper to each other so that the action that followed would be anticipated, thus barring awkward moments.

Generally speaking, we concluded that professional wrestling is pure entertainment. The fact that the wrestlers were not pummelling each other into oblivion was a relief to us nonresistant Mennonite boys.

At the end of the show, I noticed a knot of admirers near the ring looking for autographs, but we headed for the exit and then hitch-hiked home.

Back in our room we found everything in order, no summons having been slipped under our door, and no fellow students having enquired about our whereabouts. That night I had five terrible nightmares: first, Whipper Billy had to withdraw from the main event because of an overdose of fish pureée; secondly, Whipper Billy was hiding under my bed; thirdly, Whipper Billy was my study hall supervisor; fourthly, Whipper Billy was called to the principal's office; fifthly, Whipper Billy preached the sermon at my funeral using Gen. 32: 24 as his text.

The next day I felt much better. The mark of Cain, however, was still on my right hand, and so I answered questions by lifting the left. When I met the previous night's study hall teacher, she had a twinkle in her eye again, but our eyes never completely locked.

After a while the wrestling event became dimmer and dimmer in my memory. I rationalized that it had been an educational field trip, a trip that illustrated many biblical themes: wheat and tares; pride and fall; deception theme; an eye for an eye, etc.

In conclusion, I have never attended another wrestling match, no matter at what level of competition.

Moon over the Niagara

Cruising Down The River

Machiavel in Marlow's *Jew of Malta* says that there is no sin but ignorance. Oscar Wilde is more poignant when he observes that there is no sin except stupidity. My dictionary defines stupidity as "lacking in good judgement" and I certainly cannot improve on that definition.

Recently CBC radio ran a contest in which it invited listeners to submit a story about the stupidest thing each listener had ever done. One person admitted going up the down thoroughfare and being caught and fined. Another told of buying a final-sale Christmas tree and finding it was too big for the doorway. Still another reported that he had slept in on the very day he was to be evaluated at his workplace. I did not enter the contest because I was afraid of winning and then all of Southwestern Ontario would know about my stupidity.

Stupidity is born when ill-conceived and thoughtless actions more often than not mature into bitter consequences. For example, partying and immoderate drinking, and then driving home after the special event; harsh words, quarrel and irreconcilable schisms; speed, black ice or fog, and disaster while on the 401. The examples are legion and require no further listing.

Before I explain what happened to me, I should delineate the circumstances I found myself in. Niagara Christian Collegiate is situated on the photogenic banks of the Niagara River. Indeed, amateur photographers when I was there made pocket money by selling spectacular prints to their fellow students. The best view of the river was from the windows of the school library. From here, on calm moonlit nights one could see a band of golden light stretch all the way from the Canadian shoreline to the city of Buffalo. The river had a mesmerizing and inescapable draw to it like the Siren song that lured the sailors to the rocks on which they perished.

I intimated on a previous occasion that my coming to Niagara was my first extended period away from home. It was an altogether liberating experience since now I had to develop my own regimen albeit within limits, and still allow time for out-of-school adventures. The first week, for instance, I hitch-hiked to Niagara Falls and took in the unacknowledged eighth wonder of the world. Another time I hitch-hiked to Old Fort Erie, near the foot of the Peace Bridge. The visit opened my eyes to an important chapter in Canadian history. With others I took the bus to Churchill's Tabernacle in Buffalo and joined in the singing, said to have been broadcast on area radio. In short, I felt entirely unencumbered and confident, ready to confront almost any challenge.

Every night after study hall in the school, we walked along the boulevard, the river to our right, back to the Miller cabins to our sleeping quarters. My companions were Art Rempel, Bill Dick, and Fred Willms.

One evening I casually verbalized, “You know, guys, if we had a boat we could row across the river and back in half an hour and still have time for a snack of peppermint cookies.”

“We’d have to wait for a perfect night - warm, quiet, and a laughing moon.” Bill always used his images carefully. He once described one of our teachers as a glass full of warm chocolate milk. (Bill and I worked at the Lichtenberger Dairy on Saturdays.)

At this point Art washed his hands clean of the whole proposal. Being the youngest, Art was still several years away from being “cool”, to-day’s over-used expression. He also missed the unforgettable Whipper Billy Watson performance.

“Where would we get a boat?” Fred worried. “A motorboat would be too noisy. Anyway, if conditions were perfect as Bill said, the ride should be as easy as slicing baloney.” (Fred worked behind the meat counter of A&P in Fort Erie on Saturdays.)

The matter of the boat was easily solved because Mr. Miller had oars and a rowboat tied to his little dock in front of his business, and since we trusted him, we felt no need to ask his permission. Taking is not stealing when you know ahead of time that the owner will gladly and graciously comply with your request.

Perfect conditions finally prevailed on a certain Thursday in the month of October. We unfastened the rope that tied the boat to the dock and pushed off into the river. I took command of the oars, with Bill in the bow and Fred in the stern. We moved slowly at first because we had to traverse an army of bulrushes growing in the shallows near the shore.

Once we were beyond the bulrushes the rowing was easy and enjoyable. Had our situation been slightly different we would have “fortissimoed”:

Row row row your boat
Gently down the stream
Merrily merrily merrily merrily
Life is but a dream

In the distance the harbour lights beckoned us onward. We weren’t even into the current yet when something dreadfully went awry - my left oar snapped and we were adrift with just one paddle. Had our lot been less serious we might have mourned:

You are drifting far from shore
Leaning on a broken oar
You are drifting slowly drifting
Drifting down

That was the song we sometimes sang at evangelistic meetings at the school. The distinction was startling - reality and surrealism.

There was no time, however, to dwell on the niceties of language. We were moving slowly but aimlessly toward the distant Falls.

Our first assignment was to get the boat turned around so that the bow would face upstream. To that end Bill instructed that I rest my oar while he and Fred each used both hands as a paddle on the port side of the boat. Once we had the boat headed back to port the same method continued except I used my paddle to feather the water on the starboard side. Since the moon was bright we had no difficulty locating Miller's dock.

Back in our cabin I got out Mom's peppermint cookies, but they didn't have the same taste as heretofore. I cannot account for the difference in taste.

What puzzles and fazes me still is that I don't have a compelling reason for the breaking of the oar. Probable causes exist, and so I'll let my readers decide which is the most plausible.

First, the oar was riddled with rot to begin with and so could not withstand the vigorous pulling that youth exerted on it.

Second, as on at least one previous occasion, my loving grandmother interceded for me at the celestial courts of justice.

Third, my guardian angel hovered over me with its "ah! bright wings".

Fourth, the Lord's intervention: "the Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in."

Several weeks before Christmas we moved into our new quarters on campus, and the Miller experience was put behind us.

However, one day the principal said to a group of us gathered in the vestibule, "I settled the account with Miller yesterday including one strange billing. He billed me for a broken oar. I don't understand it, but I won't let it become an issue between us."

I regret now that I didn't step forward to make an explanation, but then I thought I had valid reasons for remaining silent. Now I have something to expiate, no mere pettiness.

PART V

You shall know the truth
And the truth shall make you free

On The Move Again

After my graduation from grade thirteen in the spring of 1946, I was again confronted with an alternative: to find a permanent job or to continue my education. On the side of the latter was the reality that I had had a taste of education and now I wanted the whole meal. Furthermore I had become somewhat of a misfit among my peers. They had opted for instant money by getting a job, in most cases a job related to farming, and in those days farming and education were at loggerheads.

To continue my education required financial resources, which my parents did not have. I suggested nearby Assumption College (eventually University of Windsor), but my Dad thought it unthinkable that a Mennonite pastor's son would attend a Catholic college. The entire congregation would morph into fits of hysterics. Western was briefly considered, but Dad had heard somewhere that it was intended for elite Anglo-Saxon students, and that of course left me out on two counts: money and the elite factor. Meanwhile Dad had conferred by letter with influential conference people in Newton, Kansas, and they suggested that Bluffton (Ohio) might be the answer for me.

Bluffton University is a Mennonite institution despite the fact that most of its students are non-Mennonite. To-day its enrolment is about 1200 students. (In 2005, it ranked 34th out of 107 "comprehensive" universities in the American Midwest.) It is situated on a 234 acre campus just off I-75.

Since it was a Mennonite school, it kept Dad's hopes alive that perhaps some day I would follow in his steps to a Mennonite pulpit. On further inquiry we discovered that the exchange rate on Canadian funds was very favourable; namely that I would gain ten percent on my Canadian money. What really clinched the decision to attend Bluffton, though, was their very attractive bursary, employment on campus, and a very good rating on my Grade 13 marks.

On September 3, 1946, we crowded into our '36 Ford and set out for the unknown. Dad was the navigator with map in hand, periodically estimating how far we still had to go.

We arrived shortly before lunch and drove directly to University Hall, where I went through the registration regimen and completed it with relative dispatch. My big disappointment occurred when I heard that I would be living off campus because all the dormitories were occupied to capacity. Then during registration I was asked what subject I would likely be majoring in, an issue that I had been very naïve about heretofore. I thought I was simply going to university. The American students seemed to know exactly what slot they fitted in. Not to be outdone by them, I blindly ticked off English, a decision I have never regretted. (I discovered later that my decision had not been altogether binding.)

Having decided to throw in my lot with English studies, I was advised to take some courses that would stand an English teacher in good stead should I decide to enter the teaching profession, and so I studied Oral Interpretation and Dramatic Expression and voice training in addition to the required English courses.

I decided early that I would participate in as many extracurricular activities as was prudent for me, and therefore I joined the school choir, the gospel team, and drama. The choir experience took me to places I would otherwise have never seen, including Philadelphia and New York City.

Socially I was a misfit, partly because of my living off campus the first year, and partly because of my social inexperience. In the fall of 1946 the American GI's were beginning or continuing their college education, and here I was an innocent boy from Leamington among those who had been everywhere, seen everything and had done everything. One young man, hair as white as an old man's, was in my English class but usually fast asleep. I learned from others that he had been a prisoner of war in Stalag 344 and now was making up for some of the sleep he had lost. He never participated in class discussion and according to the Alumni Directory died not long after leaving school.

There were also CPSers (American COs), but they were in the minority. As an incidental observation, by far the majority of young Mennonite men in the Bluffton First Mennonite Church went into the active service during the war. I was in the Sunday morning service when the pastor apologized to the congregation for his languid support of the peace principle during the war. I had acquaintances from both groups, and I never noticed any animosity among them. Both groups influenced my attitude to war and peace.

The school's mission statement that the truth makes free came to play early in my education. For example, I was freed from my long-standing prejudices toward others; namely, I discovered that Catholics too were considered to be Christian. The German language was not the only language that God understood. African Americans could be Christian just as much as white Americans. Practising the gospel was far more important than memorizing its tenets. Finally, a literal reading of the Bible raised more questions than it answered.

In my religion class the issue of evolution was one of our topics, and since my respected professor subscribed to it I became a convert up to a point. I affirmed (and still do) God's role in creation, but science explains the history of the universe. This time, however, I had the good sense not to inform my Dad about my opinion. What surprised me in my class was the nonchalance of the university on this matter as if that issue had been settled long ago. All of the above did not ameliorate my re-entry into my home community.

Bluffton days were eye-peeling and barrier-breaking times in my life. In later years they continued at Western Ontario, Windsor U., Westham College (England), and Laurentian U.

Bob Amstutz

In my studies of English Literature, John Milton was not my favourite writer, especially not his "Paradise Lost." As far as the doctrine goes, the poem is overwhelmingly Christian. Perhaps therein lies my problem: Satan is the best drawn of Milton's characters and speaks the most poetic lines. For instance,

> "The mind is its own place and in itself
> Can make a heaven of hell."

In other words, one's attitude to a certain situation determines how one will deal with it, and this brings me to Bob Amstutz.

When I arrived in Bluffton in the fall of 1946, I was a stranger in a foreign land, unversed in the customs and conventions of Americans, never mind their at-times peculiar spelling and pronunciation. I soon found that Americans are more self-assured and confident than Canadians while the latter tend to be reserved and somewhat cautious.

I was swept into the American mainstream when I responded to an ad on the college bulletin board calling for farm help on Saturdays and other days provided the applicant was available. It doesn't matter that I was the only applicant; what mattered was that I met Bob Amstutz, my new boss and mentor.

Bob was running his mother's farm near Bluffton that year but was also a student - in fact the same year I was in although throughout our university years we were never in the same class because his interests were in politics, mine in literature. At any rate there was plenty of work to do on the farm that fall, mainly harvesting corn and soyabeans.

Bob had served in Civilian Public Service during the war, a programme fashioned by the Historic Peace Churches for conscientious objectors. There were a number of services one could enter, all aimed however to keep COs isolated from the public. The most challenging service was at health experiment centres, where COs acted as human guinea pigs to test new drugs for averting pandemic diseases. (I digress.)

In brief, Bob had accumulated a wealth of knowledge that I could never rival. Added to his knowledge was a delightful sense of humor that made working with him a pleasure. He had an old John Deere D tractor that was as perverse and obstinate as to-day's Joe Clark. It had to be started by rotating the flywheel by hand and then getting out of the way as fast as possible when you heard the putt-puttings. When our efforts could not elicit a putt-putt we serenaded the engine with a fine duet of "You are my sunshine".

Sometimes that method worked, sometimes not. On Saturdays, Bob's mother provided us with a delicious lunch, a pleasant change from cafeteria food.

Bob and I both sang in the vesper choir, never in the same section though because he had a resonant baritone voice that could have sung any solo part except that Professor Lantz preferred Lawrence Burkholder's voice. My tenor voice was a voice from out of the desert. Our director was very fastidious in choir matters; for example, at the beginning of the year we had to affirm that we were non-smokers; otherwise we were out of the choir. Regrettably many war veterans with good voices were barred from the choir because they had become addicted to nicotine in the service. The director's rationale had nothing to do with health hazards but with the negative impact on public relations when the choir went out to sing in conservative church communities. The regulation was a non-issue for me, not an issue for Bob either because he smoked a pipe only on Saturday, and he reasoned that the regulation applied only to school days.

Not only was Bob a good employer but a generous one. He owned a '41 Chev. Coupe which from time to time he put at my disposal so that I could take my dorm-mate Glenn Kaufmann to the theatre in Findlay, about fifteen miles distant from Buffton. Glenn was a very conservative fellow and also pious. There was a theatre in Bluffton but Glenn thought being seen in the Bluffton theatre would devalue the opinion he thought others had of him. Besides, since I had a car to drive I thought we might just as well put some miles on it. (I should point out too that even in those days two male students attending the theatre received looks of askance from the others.)

My most memorable moment with Bob occurred when four of us, including Marvin Dress, decided to drive to Columbus, Ohio, to hear Norman Thomas, six time Socialist candidate for president (1928-48). His speech was eloquent, advocating a moderate brand of socialism that included an anti-war stance. For us middle-of-the-way students his words were appealing; however, most Americans were distrustful of Thomas, thinking he had ties with Communist Russia.

On the way home we picked up a lady hitch-hiker who it turned out was a lady of the night whose proffered services we demurred. Her fragrances were overpowering and could have felled a stable of oxen. Her conversation was Canadian Tire talk, a language that any simpleton could understand. We dropped her off at Kenton and proceeded on our way.

By now Dress was gasping for fresh air and so Bob stopped the car until Dress had climbed onto the hood, straddled it and flapped his arms as if they were eagle wings. We reached Bluffton with Dress feeling woozy and light-headed.

I would prefer to discontinue my account here, for what follows is the stuff of Greek tragedy and only Bob's attitude of making a "heaven of hell" enabled him to overcome.

Bob became interested in a very bright and quite attractive junior called Myrtle and to quote the Bard:

> no sooner looked but they loved
> no sooner loved but they sighed
> no sooner sighed but asked each other the reason
> no sooner knew the reason
> but they sought the remedy

Bob tells me now that he had misgivings about the relationship, for Myrtle had a mental disorder in her family, but being a man of honour and because of her insistence they married. Married life was copacetic at first, and when the issue of children arose their counsellor, well-versed in these matters, advised that their children would exhibit the best of both parents. The children's arrival was a celebratory event, but sadly one of their two boys was schizophrenic and as a boy died by his own hand. Meanwhile Myrtle became more psychotic and avaricious and wiped clean their life savings and college education fund. About that time she wrote me a letter explaining her situation, and I immediately discerned that this was not the Myrtle that I had known in Bluffton. A dissolution of their marriage followed solely at her request.

A few years later Bob remarried only to have his new wife die of cancer a few years later. When he called me after a long time lapse he said he had married Cathy and now lived in Vermont.

Bob is the only Blufftonite I still interact with consistently. When I called him recently he was grateful and cheerful about his lot in life. He is not especially devout and so for a person who has walked through the valley of the shadow I often wonder what is the source of his strength and buoyancy.

Winnifred Fett

Winnifred was one of those Americans that Rick Mercer likes to ridicule on his television programme - daft on Canadian geography and Canadian politics. Almost anything Canadian in fact. For instance, in the 1940s global warming was still Buck Rogers' science fiction, but she thought it would be a boon to Leamington farmers, for an early ice melt would lengthen the growing season for them. She thought that Canadians should stop subsidizing the English queen and spend the subsidy on worthy Canadian ventures instead. For my part I was under the illusion that the American electoral college is indeed an establishment for higher education and that the American Senate is as superfluous an ornament as is its Canadian counterpart.

Geography aside, Winnifred was a knowledgeable, gregarious, confident sophomore. We were in the same year but never in the same class, her interests being in sociology and the like. She was not part of the Vesper choir, she did not join the gospel team, in fact she didn't even attend the Mennonite Church, and yet our paths crossed many times. The explanation for the latter is that when Bob Amstutz had no work for me on Saturdays I went to work on the Fett farm. That way I had a fairly steady income paid out in American dollars.

My work began, as with Amstutz, when I answered an ad on the bulletin board. I was fairly sure the job was mine even before I was contacted, for returning GI's received a tidy government education grant, ex-CPSers looked for something more exciting than an undertakers' convention, still others were wealthy in their own right. Besides I had years of farm experience.

On Saturday morning she knocked on the dormitory door with the conventional, "Well Jake, no sacking in this morning." (She had notified me during the week that I had the job.)

"Right on, first farm work and then my term paper on Mathew Arnold's "Hebraism and Hellenism." Mathew Arnold kept us going until we reached the farm.

In those days Ohio roads even in the boondocks were asphalted, farm buildings exuded wealth, and farmers walked with the loping stride of entitlement. The latter however did not apply to Mr. Fett. He was a gentleman and everything about him was tickety-boo.

My first job was one that I had never done before and one of the loneliest because I was the only undertaker at this solo convention in a strange field. I believe that this was a deliberate test assignment to see if this foreigner was up to the job. In any case I morphed from a noun to a verb.

It was corn harvest time before the days of the combine, and the machine of choice was the corn binder. Before the binder could make a clean pass in the field a swath of corn had to be cut with the sickle. This sickled corn had to be gathered and arranged in corn shocks, which were then tied together by a single flexible stalk near the top of a shock.

I wondered where the end of the row might be, how far it might be from home, and what Mom and Dad were having to eat. My wondering stopped when I heard footsteps behind me and there was Winnifred inviting me in for lunch.

The afternoon went better because during my noon hour I had walked to the end of the row and now knew what lay ahead. Besides, Mr. Fett had tested the flexible stalks around the shocks and found them satisfactory.

For the evening meal Winnifred had gone all-out to make a culinary impression. She had prepared home-made ice-cream, the best garden vegetables and a kind of meat I had never seen before. (I felt better when I saw that the potato salad was missing.) The Fetts did not say grace, so I felt a bit heathenish when I too abstained. When I had finally finished battling the meat on my plate, Winnifred mischievously asked if I would like another helping of squirrel. I asked instead for ice-cream to move the animal down and out of my throat. Mrs. Fett explained that squirrel was not a unique meal in the family and apologized for a poor choice to complement this one. To mark their sincerity Mr.Fett gave me a surprise bonus before Winnifred drove me back to my lodging.

The next year I never saw her on campus, but then I wasn't looking for her either. Admittedly I wondered at times what might have happened to her. Then to my astonishment I noticed in the latest Alumni directory that twenty-two percent of my graduating class had already gone the way of all flesh, but Winnifred was not among the deceased. A further page revealed that she now lives in Reston, Wyoming, U.S.A.

When I contacted her by telephone, she dubbed me as a marketeer at first and was about to hang up, but she finally recognized my name and then was eager to converse. Her family was in the midst of harvest, and so we reviewed only life's basics. She concluded with a glowing testament about Bluffton, a university that almost transformed her into a Mennonite and now she was influencing her husband to adopt the Mennonite way, a type of modern-day Lydia, not in Philippi but in Reston, Wyoming.

The telephone connection was followed by a letter in which she described their farming operation: sheep and cattle and alfalfa, the latter grown with the aid of irrigation. The family picture that came with the letter revealed her as a lady that had endured some lusty winters, frosty, but kindly.

I am pleased that I came to know Winnifred Fett.

Is this the promised end?

Time

Time the old earth orbiter
Witness to generations
Remains unsentimental, mute
To passing affinities
All invariably duplicates
And yet, what's past, Time,
The common arbitrator
Will bless and crown

Dr. Paul Shelley

In the book, *Bluffton College an Adventure in Faith 1900-1950*, the authors explain the ideal attributes of a Bluffton professor.

> Bluffton faculty members must be committed to a deep Christian faith. They need not be Mennonites, but they should be sympathetic to the unique beliefs of the Mennonite Church. Little progress can be made in teaching these beliefs unless the staff is wholeheartedly committed to them. Not only should the faculty members be sincere Christians personally, but they should take an active part in the work of the church.
>
> It is also important that faculty members understand youth and appeal to young people. The ideal faculty member is perpetually a youth insofar as his ability to understand the viewpoint of youth is concerned. This means that he must be able to make legitimate adjustments in both his methods and viewpoints as times change.
>
> Knowledge of subject matter is a necessity. Clever handling of young people is essential, but it cannot be a substitute for knowledge of one's specialty. Furthermore, he must keep up to date, not only in his own field, but in general information.
>
> The Christian college teacher must have a broad social outlook. He must be something of an idealist; otherwise he cannot inspire youth to idealism. On the other hand, he must be practical; otherwise he cannot help to prepare youth for the rigours of life.

I can say without reservation that Dr. Shelley possessed all of the preceding attributes. He was especially attuned to the ways that young people are constituted. He could play ping-pong with the best of them but also offered them counsel in a non-threatening manner. When his brother, Andrew, was on campus, the two were invariably asked to provide entertainment at a post-dinner hour in the cafeteria. Their duet of "The Grumbles" was always well received. Occasionally Andrew was asked to lead the "fight" song before a football game, and Dr. Paul would be in the crowd adding his voice to the pandemonium.

I was also impressed with his disinterest in materialism and consumerism. The only suit of clothes I ever saw him wear was a black, double-breasted suit with very baggy, shiny pants, a suit not even to-day's Et Cetera Shoppe would accept. He did not own a car and I sometimes wondered whether he owned a razorstrap.

One of the requirements for graduation was completing a religion course, a requirement that some veterans (and a few others) objected to, and so a compromise was reached by which a religion course could be audited (no credit and no homework or final exam). As a result of the compromise, there were students in class that had no desire to be there, and thus made Dr. Paul's long row even harder to hoe. But he never lost his temper and always held his own, for religion was his element. His trade-mark response was, "Well, is the matter that you describe good or bad?" That gave him a moment's breathing room, and when he caught his breath, his response was lucid and substantive.

It took me a long time to get used to his style and manner because subconsciously, I think, I was comparing him with my Dad, who came from the Old School of formality and tradition and who had his mind made up on most religious matters. Dr. Shelley astonished me when he asked me to attend an interview regarding a seminary education after graduation. I attended but felt it was not the school for me.

One of his last memorable statements that I remember was that we would appreciate our education more in the future than now, that it would enable us to think critically, to make ethical assessments, and to realize what was taking place in a religious historical context.

After my graduation I lost touch with Dr. Paul, but years later I read in the alumni news that he had died a very painful death.

Of one thing I am certain - there were flights of angels singing him to rest.

Bluffton University Vesper Choir 1949-50

Men's Gospel Team at Bluffton University
(Dr. Paul Shelley first row on left; Bob Amstutz second row, fifth person from left)

"To enrich the spiritual lives of its members and members of the community"

PART VI

Where there are Mennonites there is a church

Essex County United Mennonite Church, Leamington, 1951

And There Were Added Unto Them 245 Souls

My summer sojourns in Leamington in the latter 1940s enabled me to witness the remarkable influx of Mennonite refugees from Europe.

I will say at the outset that other writers have written extensively on this subject, including Peter Dyck, T.D. Regehr, Marlene Epp, and many contributors to Mennonite papers. My purpose is to confine my observations to Mennonite refugees of the Second World War here in Leamington generally and at my church on Oak Street in particular.

N.N. Driedger estimates in his book *The Leamington United Mennonite Church* that of the approximately 8000 refugees sponsored by Canadian Mennonites, 245 became members of LUMC; the latter figure represented about 20% of the membership. (The survey took place in 1971 and included children who had become members.)

The challenge of integrating Canadian Mennonites and postwar Mennonites was considerable. Very important was the establishment of trust between the two groups. In the 1930s and beyond there had been virtually no letter exchange, let alone sending money regularly to relatives in the Soviet Union. Letters in fact were unwelcome because it raised the suspicions of the Soviet authorities of collaboration with the enemy. Trumped up convictions were many and could result in exile for those having received mail from abroad. That the Communist ideology was a godless one was well documented. It forbade the preaching of the Christian gospel. Children were indoctrinated in anti-religious values and isolated from Christian traditions. This information was received by relatives in the late 1930s when communication was still relatively risk free.

The worry of my parents as well as others was to what extent the Communist ideology had tainted and infected the religious attitudes of the new immigrants. Would they still be genuine Mennonite Christians? Indeed, would they still be interested in religion? Some of the newcomers must have received looks of askance when they arrived. In hindsight, the postwar Mennonites, so far as I interacted with them, laid down a testimony every bit as wholesome and virtuous as we Canadians. Many preachers and others had in fact given their lives for the cause of Christianity in the Soviet Union.

My Dad often remarked that integrating them may have been easier all around had the postwar Mennonites come directly to Canada instead of sojourning in Germany. As it was, the stopover in Germany resulted in some sympathy for German nationalism.

Moreover, Germany was regarded to some degree as the liberator from Soviet harassment and persecution. The German language therefore had to be retained at all costs, this at a time when LUMC was considering the use of some English in worship services. At a church membership meeting on that subject one irate long-established church member blurted out, "The immigrants are the real trouble makers!" (About ten years later those clamouring for English formed the Faith Mennonite Church; however, a German sermon is still an option at LUMC on Sunday morning to this day.)

Some immigrant men had served in the German army although this information was kept largely under wraps in order not to minimize the service of LUMC young men who had served as COs. (On February 2, 1943, the Soviet army defeated the German army at Stalingrad, and thus the latter began retreating westward. About 35,000 Mennonites in Ukraine were removed from their homes and taken westward under German military escort in the fall of 1943. When the evacuees reached Germany, all refugee men over 15 were compelled to serve in the German army in order to save the *Reich*. After the war, many of the German army men emigrated to Canada.) In my case, it raised the question whether the nonresistant stance was still valid. These decent-looking German veterans prodded and compelled me to rethink the whole peace principle, a process that is still ongoing, for I do not have all the answers yet.

I sadly remember that the immigrants were sometimes viewed with condescension by the Mennonites that had put down roots here in the 1920s. The label of DP (displaced person) was in itself a derisive label. That they were generally cliquish was documented but in hindsight understandable.

One huge advantage, though, that the newcomers had over earlier immigrants was that improved economic times in the latter 1940s offered an immediate access to the job market. That was the sticking point for the established Mennonites, who had barely survived the Great Depression and had required years to pay off their travelling debts. The newcomers paid off that *Reiseschuld* (travel debt) in short order. Of course the work was menial, labour-intensive farm work, but that same fare also applied to their counterparts. No work could be more degrading than working in tobacco fields, and both groups did plenty of that.

Having employment, however, was not enough to mask the fears and isolation that some postwar Mennonites felt. One lady remarked to my Dad,

"I am always afraid in this community."

"What are you afraid of?"

"There is no visible police presence. This is a lawless country."

Another incident involved a young couple who walked around their home at night to ensure there were no eyes and ears lurking in the shadows. Obviously some haunting memories could not be repressed.

Many of the families that immigrated to Canada were fragmented ones; that is, a member or two still lived in the Soviet Union while the others were here in Canada. One can only speculate on the emotional shocks that resulted from this separation. A group of friends and I were canoeing on Cedar Creek when from around the bend ahead we heard someone singing *"Fliege mit mir in die Heimat!"* (Fly with me to my homeland). There was an intense longing and desire in that voice.

I asked two members of LUMC, who belonged to that group of postwar Mennonites, to briefly relate their experiences. Both kindly consented and their paraphrased accounts follow.

Johanna Dyck wrote:

> My first job in this new land was at the Boese factory in St. Catharines, where I was well treated. The pay was so good that I could pay off my travelling debt by the end of the canning season.
>
> But I longed to see my boyfriend, Bernhard Dyck, who lived in Leamington, and so at the first opportunity I went to see him. On that occasion, Ben and I went to see Rev. N.N. Driedger and asked him to announce our engagement on Sunday. (I still remember the warm hug I got from Mrs. Driedger.) Our wedding took place on November 27th , the first LUMC wedding of postwar immigrants.
>
> I regretted that Mennonites in Canada had a superior attitude toward Catholics whereas my experience with Catholics in Germany was that they were tolerant of others and treated me as an equal.
>
> On one occasion here I was asked if I had come from Germany, and when I said yes, the questioner replied, "I thought you came from Europe."
>
> I am still thankful to Germany for saving me and many others from the Communist regime.

Edward Penner voiced similar sentiments:

> My first job in Leamington was pruning apples at Point Pelee Orchards owned by Franklin Anders. Mr. Anders had advanced to a high rank in the U.S. military in World War II; in fact, had been imprisoned and brutally mistreated by the Japanese in the Pacific theatre of war. However, he regarded us workers, both men

and women, with dignity and respect even though I had served in Europe with the Germany army. My staying on the job at the Point for ten years is testimony of the good treatment I received there.

Assisting in ameliorating disagreements between newcomers and immigrants of the 1920s was *Aeltester* Henry Winter Sr., a modest and much-respected gentleman. He had served as *Aeltester* of Mennonite churches in Ukraine until 1943 and was himself familiar with severe hardship and exile in his native land. He considered himself a shepherd among his fellow refugees. My Dad valued his wisdom and friendship very highly.

The immigrants also reinforced an already hostile feeling of many Leamington Mennonites toward the Soviet Union and communism. That feeling too eased their entry into local Leamington society. Both groups had experienced persecution but at different times.

The arrival of each postwar immigrant became an occasion in the life of LUMC. Each new arrival received public recognition at the beginning of Sunday morning worship. That acknowledgement signalled that we now all belonged to one church family.

When we moved to our farm home many years ago, our Anglo-Saxon neighbour said to me, "Since we are neighbours, we might just as well get along." Then as a follow-up he offered me his Massey-Harris tractor to pull out an old stump, which my '54 Ford wouldn't budge.

I believe my neighbour's formula was also the formula that brought us together at LUMC. We decided we would get along and together build the Kingdom of God. One of the first signs was a large expansion to the church building in 1948. Then since we were neighbours in the faith we recruited church workers regardless of their arrival time in Canada, and so the old and sometimes unloving distinctions of the late 1940s slowly dissolved.

Many Are Named But Few Are Chosen

Before I left for school in the late summer of 1949, a most extraordinary proceeding took place in our church; namely, an election of lay ministers. Up to this date there had been some nine lay ministers serving from time to time, but none was fluent in the English language and all were past their salad days. Now it was time, the leadership thought, to add younger men to the ministry team.

According to Dad's notes, Spiritual Council and Church Council had a motion passed in which each member, male or female, was to submit a name on a ballot. The names on the ballot were then to be tabulated and the top three vote receivers were to be affirmed as lay ministerial candidates. These three were then expected to preach on a trial basis when the *Aeltester* deemed the occasion appropriate, and at the end of a successful trial period (two years) consent to have their names stand for ordination to the lay ministry. Ordination was synonymous with a life-long promise of service to the church.

The following names (alphabetical order) were publicized after tabulations were complete:

Jacob Barkovsky
William Dick (son of William and Justina)
Jacob N. Driedger
John Driedger (which one, not specified in the notes)
Arthur Epp
Peter A. Epp
David Janzen
Jacob Janzen (son of Rev. Jacob Janzen)
Henry Neufeld (Albuna)
Jacob C. Neufeld
Arthur Rempel
William Schellenberg
Cornelius Toews (formerly of Reesor)
Henry Warkentin
Peter Warkentin
Peter Wiens
Alfred Willms

Out of a membership of over 800, there were 476 that participated in submitting a name. The top three candidates were Jacob N. Driedger, Alfred Willms, and Jacob C. Neufeld. Ironically, a few men on the list who had expressed an interest in lay ministry before the

whole process began, were not among the finalists. As of this writing, five men on the original list of seventeen are still alive to-day. (No correlation between life expectancy and call to ministry intended.)

By the time the finalists were announced, I was already back in school, my graduating year, and so at the end of September I received a letter from Mom telling me what had transpired during my absence. (Mom was more adept at breaking sensitive news to her children than Dad.) In any case, the perturbation would have been the same. Simply put, since I had never shown any apparent public interest in ministry, I simply assumed that my name would be passed over; that was not to be.

When the distress had somewhat subsided, I began contemplating the issue of what constituted a calling. Was there a specific call to ministry or a call to Christian service generally? Were some of the dramatic calls as noted in Scripture still valid thousands of years later? Was a call to ministry by the congregation purely motivated, or did ulterior motives factor in? For instance, David Rempel comments in his book *A Mennonite Family in Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union 1789-1923* that "the farmers accepted the selection of their preachers from the teaching profession, as much because they believed they had already paid the teacher for his services as through a sense that the teachers were learned." (P.59) When I was on staff at UMEI in the 1950s one board member mused, "Ideally, we would like teachers who are financially well-established in their own right." In both cases the concept of a higher calling to Christian service was tainted with Mammonism.

Some years prior to 1949, Dr. Abraham Warkentin of Bethel College spoke in our church on the subject of Christian calling. He named three prerequisites: converted, summoned, and gifted. To me his sermon could have applied to any Christian service endeavour, to ministry as well as to social work, to teaching, to Mennonite Disaster Service, nursing, etc. Dr. Paul Shelley had essentially the same opinion as Warkentin's.

On one occasion he sent me to Dr. S.F. Pannabecker, president of our Mennonite seminary, but his opinions were quite barren of an instant fix; namely, that I would have to wrestle through the issues myself, perhaps by enrolling in appropriate courses at seminary. In the end I decided to forgo the ministry as such and to pursue some other avenue of service. What probably tipped the scales decisively was having watched my Dad weighed down with unending responsibilities and grim privations.

In later years there were other slates of candidates put forward, but by then I was no longer closely involved in the selection process. A few final words: to-day's congregations must find ways to help people, even early in life, to explore the ministry. In that way they can test their gifts and develop them.

Note: Jacob C. Neufeld was ordained in 1951 and served until his death in 1974. Alfred Willms declined but serves as a ministerial assistant to this day.

Apples

Yesterday the metronomic pulpit trainee
Presented a cracker barrel sermon
On the church as the apple of God's eye

Today I pick apples
In my new neighbour's orchard
Bows bent heavy with fruit
Blushing and shapely
But yet deficient
Scabbed, worm-tunnelled, bird pecked
Camouflage aflame
At times only surgical slit
Reveals the rotten core
A seductive worm
Has punctured the blossom end
Leaving scarcely a trail
Of its trophy

I wonder in whose orchard
The trainee was picking

Passing On The Faith

While I was pursuing my education out of the country, an unusual educational endeavour was struggling to be born here in Leamington - to be precise, a private, church-related high school. Many Russian Mennonite immigrants that had come to Essex County in the 1920s had received an excellent education in such a school; thus the ardent desire to duplicate the old-world experience in their newly-adopted land.

In the winter of 1944-45 a three-month day school opened in the church basement of the old clapboard United Mennonite Church. The instructor, Mr. Jacob A. Dyck, of Niagara had been hired by the church for that period and in the first year of operation Mr. Dyck had twelve students under his tutelage.

In 1945-46 Grade nine and ten subjects were added to the curriculum of the Bible school. Enrolment now increased to twenty-five with Mr. Dyck continuing as principal and Mr. John C. Neufeld hired to assist in academic instruction. The following year Grade eleven was added and so to meet the increased academic load Miss Helen Braun of Manitoba joined the staff. By now enrolment had reached an impressive sixty-two.

Meanwhile a new school was being built on the sixth concession of Mersea Township. It is not the purpose of this paper to delve into the variety of site locations that had been considered. Suffice it to say that the dynamics of choosing the sixth concession site were rather typically Mennonite for that time. First, the school had to be situated well away from town in order to mitigate the alleged evil influences of the latter. (Subsequently, as a result, transportation for some students became a problem.) Secondly, a rural setting would influence and remind students of the fine agrarian past that most of their forebears had loved so dearly.

Soon after the war, building material was as scarce as the world's peace had been, and so cinder building blocks had to be hauled from Windsor to the building site. Since bricks were out of the question, the blocks were stuccoed and painted white.

So far as I can determine, no architect had drawn up building plans (too expensive), and so the finished building was a mixed stew of unplanned space: a library/staff room, a cubicled principal's office, a windowless vestibule. (Minutes reveal that two hundred dollars was spent on blue prints prepared by a local carpenter but one would be hard-pressed to find evidence of careful foresight.) But it was a school, and it was our own.

The Grade eleven class moved into the unfinished building in the winter of 1947, and in the fall of the same year the school officially opened, offering a four-year high school

experience approved by the Department of Education. In the fall of 1947 Armin Sawatzky of Altona, Manitoba, had assumed the principalship with Rev. J. A. Dyck consenting to teach Bible courses until Christmas at which time he would enter full ministry in Niagara. Rev. Abram Rempel and Elder J.H. Janzen of Waterloo would take turns completing Rev. Dyck's term.

The school was called the United Mennonite Bible School until 1948 at which time it became United Mennonite Educational Institute, a name that gave prominence to the academic pursuits of the school.

I continue with a topic that has received little attention in UMEI historical accounts; to wit, the school and the Anglo-Saxon community. Even though a mission statement of sorts is found in the original constitution, this statement was never publicized so that the community did not have a fundamental explanation for what the Mennonites were up to on the sixth concession. As a consequence rumours and disparaging tales abounded to the point where some impetuous young people thought it necessary to defend the UMEI, in case of Hallowe'en shenanigans. As the school was being built, John A. Campbell, insurance agent and popular "pencil man" among school children, stopped, asked questions, and remarked, "What's wrong with Leamington High School?" Had he known that part of the school's mandate was to preserve the German language, his disbelief and shock would have keeled him over into the treacherous quicksand on the north-east corner of the footings.

Some years later when it became apparent that Mennonite families were shrinking in numbers, the board called an informal meeting to consider inviting non-Mennonites to UMEI as if years of mutual estrangement could suddenly be reversed. My Dad to his discredit summed up the sentiments of the assembly when he remarked, "When you put a sparrow and a canary in a bird cage, the canary (Mennonite) will eventually adopt the song of the sparrow (non-Mennonite)." A young man after the meeting ventured, "We could be trading up, not down, if we accept others."

In conclusion, UMEI through the years has done yeoman work in passing the faith to Leamington young persons as well as to persons from other regions. In this day of antagonism between Christian and Muslim in some lands, in this day of the casualization of the church generally, we need a steady stream of women and men who have been instructed in the faith tradition in order to retain its identity. If there are aspects of our heritage worth preserving, then we need a UMEI.

Spring 1947

1944-45 Dayschool Class

Back row: l to r - George Neufeld, Herman Dick, Jacob Baerg, Abram A. Driedger, Henry Janzen, Abram J. Driedger, John Bergen, George Baerg

Front row: l to r - Mary Toews, Mary Bergen, Elder N.N. Driedger, Rev. J.A. Dyck, Mary Hamm

PART VII

Poetry, not for children but for adults only

Dad in Moscow in 1916
in Red Cross uniform

Terror on Highway 77 (2005)

Forget the terror in the East
There's plenty here at home
On the main road to Tomatoville

Potholes, not chamber sized
But bomb craters too deep
For pothole platoons to putty over

Potholes like crack terrorists
Sneak up on you
Disguised as civil mandarins
Harmless but cleverly imbedded
In the roadscape
Only to strike with shock and awe
Like exploding road mines
On being struck
Catapulting the victim into unintended cartwheels

The vehicular genocide inflicted by
Pothole terrorism on innocent motorists
Defies exaggeration
Call it the road to perdition on
The road on which you fall
Not among thieves
But headlong into the dark abyss

Desist the carnage in the East
And target pothole alley now
Before we float the *Jimaan* into town

The Fog

Like an executioner's hood
The fog descends on a helpless land
"From Hillman marsh to McGeachy pond
From Zug island to Sinclair bush and beyond"
I am trapped in my car
Seeing and not seeing
Moving and not moving
My wipers are agitated and restless
Meaning well
But like a pop gun in a tank attack
The guiding line almost obliterated
Another Harris' conservation

I should have stayed at home
We cannot choose our father and our mother
We cannot choose our birthplace
But we can choose our duties
Duty is above all choices
At times pitched overboard
Despite some highbrow moral verbiage
That looks impressive on a tombstone
HE DIED DUTY BOUND
I could have done my duty at another time
A colossal sacrificial act at lesser risk
But here I am
No turning back
On Frost's equivocating road not taken
No matter
They were all fog bound

My only hope
That I will make a difference

At the end

A Hound's Premonition

(On January 17, 2005, eight hunters boarded a Cessna Caravan at Pelee Island airport. Shortly after take-off the Cessna plunged onto Lake Erie ice and disappeared, killing all ten people aboard.)

he refused to board
omnibus excuses
peed against the wheel
long after his supply was empty
then sniffed the icy air
and snorted an opinion
away he dashed
dislodging phantom pheasants
hesitation, avoidance and delay

at last
blind, forced obedience
pulled him aboard
whimpering in the aisle
as the Cessna Caravan roared into the fog
and reached the Rubicon
at which high moment
the pilot having tossed
upon his chance
uncomplaining saw he'd lost
set free the helpless Icarus

now out there in cold and ice
with only traces of the ghastly deed
serene, composed surrounded
by its icy whelps
nature in neanderthalic stare
is still the ruler of the latitudes

I Just Want To Hide In A Cave (Post Sept. 11)

I think of myself as a grown-up
Responsible, thoughtful, and brave
But when I cast nervous eyes skyward
I just want to hide in a cave

The papers show ads for vacations
"Sign up for a cruise now and save!"
I don't want to sleep in a cabin
I just want to hide in a cave

I went to a service for comfort
And crouched at the back of the nave
I sensed that the ceiling was falling
I just want to hide in a cave

I went to a clinic for counselling
And liked the advice that they gave
"Your case is a trifle abnormal
Just hide at the back of a cave"

I long for the days ere September
When pleasures engendered a rave
But now when so many feel guilty
'Tis better to hide in a cave

When Jezebel stalked the great prophet
To lodge in a cave he would crave
The prophet survived the incursion
So why couldn't I in a cave

I have haunting fears of bin Laden
The jihad and Sunni enclave
I exult that the Muslim fanatics
Must also hide out in a cave

bypass maniac

cruisin' on the bypass
feelin' unsublime
forced a twit right off the road
now i'm makin' time

got this slow poke 'head of me
takin' in the sight
i'll jist wake him up a bit
pass im on the right

tail-a-gatin's quite the sport
this here road is mine
and if need i'll run the light
at the arner line

down at work i'm proud to be
by-pass maniac
and they wonder every day
that i'm always back

where the cops are i dunno
maybe parked and flossy
at some essex eatin' joint
gettin' pumped with coffee

i'm against a four-lane road
costin' scads o' money
always some twerp in the crowd
out to kill what's funny

****

In conclusion, I am reminded of Jaques' delightful stages of man speech in Shakespeare's memorable "As You Like It". Jaques speaks of seven stages, including the lover sighing like a furnace and the soldier that seeks the bubble reputation even in the cannon's mouth. I have wrapped the lover and the soldier into one and called it the putting-away-childish-things stage. Let there be no mistake, though, I have no quarrel with the Bard of Avon's <u>seven</u> ages.

In this book I have been on a voyage of rediscovery. At times I was somewhat surprised how readily the memory of places, people, and occurrences of long ago crystallized in the mind's eyes. Someone once said that a good school lights a spark within its students that is never extinguished, and so when for example I speak with individuals that once attended Niagara Christian Collegiate, we inevitably recall some cliquish experience or event that was dear to us years ago. We are cliquish in that respect much to the annoyance of those who have no "Fort Erie" connections. The same effect applies to other places that left me with the gift of a small flame.

There is no way of knowing what my children and grandchildren will make of the forks in the old roads that I travelled, but I want them to know that the roads are there so that they can travel their unknown roads ahead sure of the roads behind.

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