Our Heritage

Pacific Northwest Mennonite Historcal Society Newsletter

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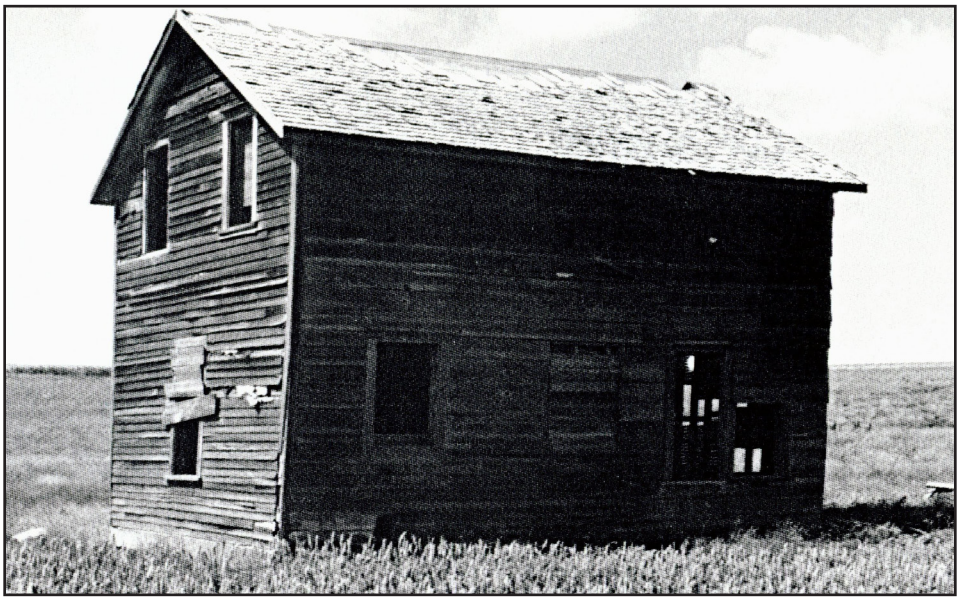
PNMHS Fall Meeting

Immigrant Daughter: A Monument to Poverty

By Tina Kauffman

When my parents and five children came to Canada in 1925 they had a Dutch name, were proud of their German language and culture, and had Russian citizenship.

Two years later I was born in Saskatchewan on a very stormy November night. I was their first Canadian. Their name was Klassen which is Dutch, but in Prussia the name spelled 'Claassen' and was proudly carved above the household's front door.



The house where Tina lived with her family at Rush Lake, Saskatchewan, from 1929-37. The picture was taken in 1977, and inspired Tina's book title, as the house was a monument to the family's abject poverty. Photo courtesy the Kauffman family.

In 1982 I had no intention of writing a book or to tell my family's story to the historical society today. In 1982 I started to work for the Senior and Disabled Services in Albany. My tall coworker, Maureen, an Irish Catholic, wanted to know who I was. She asked a lot of questions and was curious about the information I gave her.

She was interested in my parents coming from Russia, but speaking German and having a Dutch name. Maureen was also interested in my being a Mennonite. She had never known a Russian Mennonite. After I told her all she wanted to know she said, "You need to write it down."

Our two daughters were in much the same position. Who were they? They were full blooded Americans. They knew their father's family, his church, his language, his country, his culture. They went to see Grandma Kauffman who taught Lynette to read and understand the Hershberger and Kauffman genealogy books.

They knew mostly American foods, but I served a smattering of foods whose origins could be Dutch -- like pancakes (similar to crepes), delicious soups like summer borsch (could it be Polish?) or the well known cabbage borsch, and verenichi, which are

Duplicate Periodicals Available For Free

Purpose	1969-1975, 1979-1990 (issues missing)
Words of Cheer	1944-1950
Mennonite Life	1946-1953, 1954-1958
Missions Now	1998-2001 (issues missing)
Signs of the Times	2004-2007 (issues missing)
Rejoice	1990-1997, 2000 (some issues missing)

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Russian, and a version of scrambled eggs called reah rei.

But what did they know about my heritage? They could not converse with my German speaking mother. They did not know her German songs. They did not know their Canadian second cousins but did learn to know their Russian Mennonite first cousins.

I wanted our daughters to know my story as well as Ray's so I began to write an "I REMEMBER" book, listing whatever I could remember from childhood to adulthood, including, pictures, maps and records from the Immigration Department of Canada. I knew all about school, our only close neighbor, our cousins, the church and all about farming and gardening. And I knew my parents' moods of depression due to poverty.

Family records were scant. My grandfather had recorded some of the births and marriages. A double cousin from Paraguay sent his family's statistics. I remembered the air mail letters coming from Paraguay and my aunt and uncle's trying to prosper in the hot Chaco. My uncle Abram Klassen died in the Chaco before I was born.

My mother shared her memories. We owned a heavy brass Russian-made wash basin which we polished with ashes. An aunt inherited the Russian version of a Mennonite covering. No, it wasn't made of white net, but rather a black, lacy and ruffled affair that married women wore. My grandmother wears it in a photo. Mother had none. I was told it meant the woman is married. But they wore wedding rings also.

Then when I retired in 1990, and could give more time to the project of recording the family story I worked on making a book with paragraphs from the earlier "I Remember" stories.

When I started writing, my older sister asked blandly, "What's to write about?" But I had heard that authors write about what they knew. When I was a child I remembered that my cousin's romance started when she was picking gooseberries and her admirer got her attention by tossing a few berries over the bush she was picking. That would be part of a story if I ever wrote one. It

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was only an idea that struck me as romantic.

Joan Kropf and Lynn Miller were two of the first to read the beginning story. Spending our winters in California, beginning in the early 90's gave me time to work on my family's story.

Then, in the fall of 1996 just before going to CA, we bought a word processor. I had no time to learn how to use it. I took all my reams of notes and information along to California where I imposed on an acquaintance to teach me how to use the word processor. I worked on the story all winter and finished it the next spring. It was not done professionally and I knew it. But it was good enough.

Many trips later to the Lazer-Quick print shop in Albany I had spiral notebooks with the complete story on paper and ready to give to our children. Extra copies were made for my siblings and their offspring. I thought I was finished with my goal of preserving history.

Some readers of Russian Mennonite history may know my story better than I do. Stories of immigrant families like mine were repeated often in Canada. My eyes were strained and I never wanted to face the process of publishing. I closed that chapter of my life and let it rest.

In September 2009 Ray and I went to Kansas for the centennial of Hesston College. Margaret Shetler, our PNMHS archivist, needed a ride. The subject of my book came up.

Being the historian that she is, she learned about my story and asked to read it. Sure, why not? Before long she invited us for lunch. She had already read the spiral-bound version and at my request had a list of suggestions on how to improve it. From there on there was little question that we would try to publish. Thank you, Margaret.

Our neighbor, Margaret Dutton, a retired educator, also agreed with Margaret Shetler that the story needed to be published. When John Sharp from Hesston College was our house guest later that fall, he read the book and gave his "Amen!" to the notion of publishing. The following winter in California was very busy with reading, correcting and rereading the book. Now Ray was fully involved.

Ray did all the investigating about publishing: contacting potential publishers, the length of time required to publish, the style of book, the costs, contacting other authors and much more. Finally, in the spring of 2011 we asked Lee Snyder whether she would edit. She graciously consented. Her work and the changes made as a result of that edit made the thought of publication plausible. We appreciate her professional style. Thank you, Lee.

This photo shows Tina's parents and her brother, Gerhard (George), circa 1916. Photo courtesy the Kauffman family.

For those of you who know the history of the Dutch Mennonites, you know that because of persecution in the 16th century many of them fled from Holland. *Martyrs Mirror* graphically depicts many scenes of torture and death by drowning, burning at the stake, etc.

One classic is Jan Luyken's etching of Dirk Willems rescuing his pursuer, a bailiff, who nevertheless arrested Willems. In 2007 with TourMagination Ray and I stood on the banks of the river near Asperen in The Netherlands, where in 1569 Dirk Willems was burnt to death for his faith.

My people emigrated from Holland in the mid-16th century, and travelled along the Baltic seashore to the Vistula Delta in Poland. Danzig (now Gdansk) was a flourishing city in the Hanseatic League. In this city there is evidence of Dutch architecture to this day, remarkably like the ones we saw in Holland.

In Gdansk we also visited a church that had at one time been a Mennonite church. Menno Simons preached in this Danzig church in 1549.

The Vistula River, one of many tributaries, flows into the Baltic at this Danzig port. The delta was a lowland much like the lowlands in Holland. The Mennonites knew how to build dykes and drain the swampy delta to reclaim and transform it to valuable farm land.

In the course of time they developed large tracts of very fertile farms, a great asset to the country. The Polish rulers encouraged this through various privileges and exemption from military service. Today Mennonites are recognized in Poland for their important contributions centuries ago to the economic development of this region.

After several partitions of Poland in the late 18th Century, the Mennonites became Prussian subjects. In 2001 Ray and I traveled with a Mennonite tour group to look for my Prussian ancestral homeland. My maternal family name was Unger. We wanted to see a home formerly owned by Ungers. Our guide knew of one home that had been Mennonite but dared not take us there because when the guide had taken a tourist to this farm previously, the lady of the house shook her fist at the intruders, apparently thinking they wanted to reclaim their land.

But we did see the farm buildings from afar and saw healthy cattle feeding in green pastures. I knew that a Peter Unger who produced a Peter Unger had emigrated from Prussia to Russia. More Peter Ungers were born to a Peter in Russia and my mother came from a large Peter Unger family. She married my father, Gerhard Klassen, the surname I mentioned earlier.

Prussia, for a long time, had been a good place to live. The farmers prospered and we saw the huge houses they left behind. We also saw churches and the remains of cemeteries. We searched for specific locations and names on houses or graveyards but none were conclusive. Brush covered the tomb stones in neglected graveyards.

In the past ten years youth from Holland, Germany, and France have worked to clean up these old Mennonite cemeteries. There is even a Polish Museum in this area honoring and preserving the history of early Mennonite pioneering and life here.

In church they adhered for many years to the Dutch language. Eventually they spoke German instead of Dutch in their homes and in their churches. There are a few Polish names in the church files today: Sawatzky, Laskowski and others less well known. They adhered to their Mennonite faith including their belief in pacifism.

In spite of their finding a refuge in Prussia, over time tensions developed. Prussia became unsympathetic to their non-military position. The Mennonites felt discrimination in trade, such as in selling and trading their products. Lace making was a Dutch art, for example, but trade was restricted. In lieu of military service they were forced to pay taxes to support a nearby military academy. They were second class citizens.

They wanted to be treated as equals but refused conscription. Restrictions were put on the amount of land they could buy to support their expanding population.

Neither the Mennonites nor the Prussian government was content. Many Mennonites from Poland immigrated to Russia and North America. The last Mennonites in Poland fled for their lives at the end of World War II. My family's ancestors left much earlier, in about 1789.

At the Klassen's first home in Canada, 1931. Back row: Lena, Annie, and Nettie Klassen. Front row: Tina, Justine, and Henry Klassen. Photo courtesy the Kauffman family.

Some of you will remember that Catherine the Great in Russia came from Prussia and did not forget her homeland. While she reigned in Russia in the 18th century she went to Prussia and Germany to invite Mennonites, Lutherans, and Catholics to settle in Russia on land taken from the Turks in a recent war.

Two Mennonite scouts from Prussia went to see the promised land and returned to tell their countrymen of the agreement they made with the Russian government. There was good land in the steppes of the Ukraine to be had and military exemption and other privileges were promised.

In turn the Mennonites were forbidden to proselytize the Russian Orthodox Church members. They would live in colonies separate from the Russians and control their own villages, churches and schools. In these colonies, Mennonites could worship freely. They could keep their German language.

Emigration from Prussia began in 1789. The first colony, called Chortitza, was next to the Dnieper River. All my known ancestors settled in this area. Chortiza was close to the city of Zaporozhye, today a large Ukrainian city. The second colony was established in 1804 and called Molotschna. Each of these two colonies consisted of several dozen small villages where immigrants lived close together like in a small town with their fields being away from the housing area.

Here again the Mennonite settlers prospered, some becoming quite wealthy. Manufacturing as well as agriculture was well advanced. After graduating from Mennonite High Schools, students attended University in far away St. Petersburg and at institutions in various European countries. Ray and I visited many of the villages in both Chortiza and Molotschna when we toured the Ukraine (no longer a part of Russia) in 1996.

My parents were born approximately a century after the first immigrants arrived. By this time the colonies had outgrown the available farmland and looked for more land. In 1888 a Russian sold his thousands of hectares to the Mennonites, located some 254 kilometers mostly east and a little north of the old colony. Hearsay is that his name was Ignatyev so they named their daughter colony Ignatyev. The soil was black and stone free, the climate pleasant.

Grandfather Unger moved his family of six to this would-be earthly Eden. My mother was a year old. My father's family would migrate from Chortitza to this village in Ignatyev when he was a young man. The village itself was named Grigorjewka, after Gregory.

Those years of our parents and grandparents were called the Golden Era. Although in 1789, Mother Russia did not give them the fertile land promised them in the Kherson area, nearer to the Black Sea, and the land in the Old Colony was inferior, the Mennonites prospered during the approximately 150 years they occupied the land.

Village life had been safe and secure, provided a church and school, wholesome family life, freedom of religion, a social life, abundant fruit and vegetables and good crops. Their village had white picket fences along the street, guarding the fruit trees and gardens. In their connected

house and barns under one roof, they felt protected.

For my parents and their people in the village of Gregorjewka, it was not until Nicholas the II was forced to abdicate the throne in 1917 that they felt insecure. After all they were just a small dot on the map of the Russian empire, isolated and far away from seats of power. However, 18,000 of their fellow believers, Mennonites from the two original colonies and other daughter colonies, saw "the writing on the wall" and immigrated to North America already in 1874-1875.

Their freedoms were threatened and the government could no longer be trusted to keep their promises. For example, German could no longer be the language used in Mennonite schools. Before long, military exemption would be denied. But in Grigorjewka the emigration did not begin until the mid-1920s. This time, in the second exodus, 25,000 migrated to the United States, Canada, and South America.

There were many uncertainties for those who stayed behind after the 1870's migration. Now, in addition to fear of losing their privileges like freedom of religion and exemption from the military, there were many uprisings that portended a bigger revolution coming. Some were hopeful and decided to wait out the Russian revolution but others were afraid.

My Klassen grandmother had been widowed three times and my father was operating her farm. This was not a way to get rich but it was a good life until the revolution. Grandma died of natural causes in 1924, a year before our parents left. She was buried in Grigorjewka.

My maternal grandparents were comfortable but a daughter and her husband had died during the flu epidemic, leaving behind five orphan children. My parents grieved the death of their own oldest two children, three and one, in 1915. They had two childhood communicable diseases at the same time. My mother still grieved their death ten years later but after living in Saskatchewan for some years she plainly said, "They are better off dead."

Grandpa Unger had the means with which to help his children emigrate. He paid their fare to Canada.

However, two of his children did not make it to Canada. One was imprisoned in Siberia and later lived in Khirghiz near the northwest corner of China, and one went to Paraguay because she had trachoma of the eyes and Canada would not accept her. And one orphaned niece also remained in Russia with aunts on the other side of the family. And thus the family was torn between three continents never to see each other again.

My parents and their five children had legitimate visas and in 1925 took the train to Riga, Latvia, then on to Southampton, England, where they boarded the

This picture, taken in 1925, shows the Klassen family. Back row: son Gerhard and father Gerhard. Front row: Anna, Helena, Mother Anna holding Heinrich. Nettie is missing at front left, as she needed a picture of herself for school. Photo courtesy the Kauffman family.

ship, Minnedosa, and after four weeks, arrived safely in the Quebec harbor. An unknown world of smoky black chimneys defined the horizon, Mother remembered. They knew not a word of English. Feeling like foreigners began in England where they had to be examined by physicians to pass a health inspection required for immigration. Dad recalled that he had been looking for the dining room and said to the steward "*Essen Essen*." The Brit showed him the bathroom. And that was only the beginning of orientation.

In Canada they took a long train ride to Steinbach, Manitoba, where Dad's half brother awaited him and his family. His brother could not accommodate them because his family had arrived recently also. A Reimer family in the area accepted them in their home. Mrs. Reimer had recently delivered a baby and needed household help. My mother's baby had celebrated his first birthday on the ship and she had three daughters aged two to eight and a ten-year-old son. They were Gerhard, Aganetha, Anna, and Helena and Heinrich. In Canada they became George, Nettie, Annie, Lena, and Henry.

So my mother had her own hands full. She seldom complained about the work but talked about the things that were entirely new to immigrants. She and Dad had been in the Reimer cellar and saw the jars of canned peaches. They had never seen peaches and were unfamiliar with canning. What is this, they wondered. Like Adam and Eve they were curious. To open the jar was a challenge but they got it open and took out only one half of a peach and closed the jar. Mother chuckled as she told the story later, because she knew the peaches would have spoiled.

One night they saw the work of God in those northern skies, full of bright and moving lights. What kind of signal was God trying to give them? They had already experienced enough drama on the other side of the Atlantic. They soon learned about Canada's beautiful and innocent northern lights.

I think they spent only the winter in Manitoba before they followed Dad's sister and her family to Blumenort, Saskatchewan. In 1926 some shacks in southern Saskatchewan were emptied by conservative Mennonites who left Canada to go to Mexico where they could have their own school instead of the English schools in Canada, which were compulsory.

My dad knew farming as the only way to make a living. He needed land, implements, a house and a barn and animals, but he had nothing. And Mother needed a table, chairs, beds and bedding, a stove, a sewing machine, dishes and all that goes with beginning all over again.

Dad began to earn a living by working for farmers; not all of them knew German. Again he was in trouble when helping a farmer catch his horse in a pasture. The farmer said, "Catch him, catch him," and he did. But the farmer still kept saying, "catch him," so thinking he misunderstood, Dad let the horse go. Then Dad heard some unforgettable language from the farmer, though he never forgot the meaning of "catch him."

I was two when Dad bought his first farm about fifty miles from his sister and her family. You will read in the book about his loan, the burden of the debt, and how it was paid off. This was in the autumn of 1929, the year of the stock market crash; soon came the decade-long Great Depression and the beginning of the long years of drought. What Dad didn't know was that this farm was in the middle of the Paliser Triangle where a glacier had melted, and the land was dry and stony.

Here in this place I have my earliest memories. And they were happy memories. I was too young to understand the agony of poverty. As long as I remember I played with my younger sister, Justine, who was born in the spring of the first year we lived on that farm. When she was older Justine and I played endlessly with

The Ivan and Pearl Kropf Heritage Center Needs Volunteers

If you are available to help one or more days a month at our library and archives, located in Hubbard, Ore., please contact Jerry Barkman at jbarkman@canby.com.

paper dolls cut out of the Eaton's catalogue or with our hairless dolls, pretending we were mothers and having meals with our toy dishes.

I also remember how my brother Henry sought me to play with him on the binder, running old rubber tires down the hill, climbing onto the granary roof, and hiding in the barn to watch a chicken lay her egg.

Our town was Rush Lake, a little farm community with two streets that made an ell. It had two country stores, a small hotel, a country doctor, a United Church of Canada, a post office and a brick school where all 12 grades were taught by two teachers.

It was also where our cousins lived. Their parents owned the store. We were literally their country cousins. Our world consisted of that little town and our 160 acre farm two miles from town.

If our farm had only had a producing well, we would have been happy. The farmer before us had attempted to dig a well without reaching water. Dad began to dig the dry earth to a depth of about 50 feet. Not a drop of water from that well in the eight years we lived at Rush Lake. We had a dug-out which we called the slough that collected snow water in spring. Dad hauled water from other farms with horses and wagon for eight years! In freezing cold he took the horses and the sleigh two miles to a farmer who allowed him to fill his barrels, one by one with a bucket. It rarely rained.

Some years Dad harvested some grain. I remember it because my brother and I played in the bin and when Dad found out we were told never to do it again because the walls of the bin would break. It was a place where the fall smoked hams were buried to preserve them in winter, and to keep the mice from finding them. No grain was to be wasted.

Rush Lake became to us a place of having a lot of nothing. No electricity, indoor plumbing, or other modern conveniences like a car, but that was true for many people of that day. But we didn't have even the bare necessities so we learned to improvise. We had no bath towels, no toothpaste, no shoe polish, no trees, no hair brush for my tangled curly hair, no books except the German Bible and a black and white Bible story book, no curtains, no Mennonite church.

Mother had lost all her teeth and could not afford dentures. Dad even threatened to have us recycle our school workbooks so we could use them again. We would have to erase the penciled writing and arithmetic. That is once I pleaded for mercy. "Dad, if we have to work with erased paper I would no longer enjoy school!" We never did. I loved school. We had a marvelous teacher by the name of Miss Erskine.

Christmas was another story. I got a combined car/motorcycle toy when I was eight. Dad had done the shopping. My sister, Annie, got stockings. There was only enough fabric for two sisters' dresses at Christmas instead of three. One had to wait until spring when another order went from the catalogue.

The year 1937 was more brutal than all the other years.

There was no crop at all. Dust storms, grasshoppers and army worms had taken every stalk. Green tumble weeds were abundant so Dad and Henry harvested them and stacked them in the yard. They turned from green to black stacks. The stacks were black because the worms had made them poisonous to animals.

Relief came from the government at last. It offered a free railroad car and transportation to anyone who wanted to move out of the dustbowl. My Dad could never say enough good things about the Canadian government for this and for stability, dependability, and lack of corruption. What a contrast to his native land. The book tells about the move.

On Sept. 9, 1937, we arrived at Winnipegosis, Manitoba, to make our new home. It is about 200 to 250 miles north of North Dakota. It was a new chapter in our lives. Our parents started over when they were fifty and fifty-two years old. But now they had some live-stock, implements and meager household items. And their children were old enough to help with household chores and farming.

That first winter was the hardest winter we had ever seen. We had not expected anything worse than 1937. Now we faced 1938. We lived in a log and mud plastered house with an earthen floor. We could keep warm here. We had wood to burn. Manitoba had trees. But we still had no money.

I cannot go in detail about how we survived, but the three of us youngest children suffered skin infections. We were malnourished. The animals suffered much more than we did. It was a very cold winter and they did not get enough quality fodder to keep them healthy. One horse fell while trying to pull a sleigh across a gravel road. That horse did survive, but another did not.

Henry, Justine and I went to a country school, named Nordheim, taught by a Russian Mennonite. We had three and a half miles of mostly cross country farm roads to get to school. We attended school only three days a week because the horse was too weak to go five times. It was a school full of immigrant children, both Ukrainian and German-Mennonite.

I cannot tell you today how mean that teacher was. It is in the book. I lost all love of learning. We students were, without exception, all very poor. One boy had no shoes so he wore rubbers meant to be worn over shoes. They were also too big so he wore rubber rings over the instep to keep them on his feet.

At this point of utter hopelessness how does one ever get past the poverty, the lack of education, the degradation and become a useful citizen of the world? Even the Canadian Pacific Railroad tracks ended here. I would gladly have been a fourth grade drop-out. It seemed to be the end of the world as we had known it.

One significant positive: We had a German Mennonite church. Every Sunday we went to church. We made friends. About forty families attended here. Everyone had migrated from Ukraine to Canada during the 1920's. Some even came from Grigorjewka.

This was still pioneering country. New land was being broken. Here there was hope. We had Sunday school, and sermons by uneducated ministers. And the next year we would go to a different school. For my three older sisters this was an oasis in more ways than one: there were girls their age and young men whom they learned to know at innocent evening parties.

Spring came at last and Dad bought a farm with borrowed money - again. There were no buildings on the property so the building began. Henry, 13, and Dad got free lodge-pole pines to build a house and a barn. Annie and Lena mixed the clay and water and plastered every inch of both buildings with their two hands. In summer my oldest sister, Nettie, married. George, my oldest sibling, was by now on his

The Klassen home at Rush Lake, after its collapse. Tina Kauffman has labelled this photo "A Farewell to Poverty: Poverty on its Knees." Photo courtesy the Kauffman family.

own and worked in Regina.

Before the end of the school term in June 1938, we moved into our new mud/log house. Our horses and cows had green pastures and the chickens grazed in the grassy yard. We had milk and eggs and sold cream every week. It was income. The garden was big and growing. The grain grew on good black soil.

It was by no means instant wealth but we prospered. The new school with 56 students was taught by a dear man who did his best to teach that many children in a one room school. But I had lost my zeal for learning anything. No one in our church, except Mr. Dyck, had an education. A few of us went to winter Bible school so we could teach Sunday school. But why go to high school? Everyone got married and lived on a farm. That would be my future, too.

I will jump from age ten to age twenty in my story now. Dad was getting too old to farm, and all my older siblings were married. Dad sold the farm to my brother-in-law, Nettie's husband, John Redekop, for $8,000. Justine had left earlier to work in B.C. for my oldest brother, George, who owned Sunrise Bakery in Cranbrook. In the spring of 1948 we had the only auction sale of our lives. The farm, all of the animals, the implements, and the little furniture we had, were sold.

My parents and I took the train to Abbotsford, B.C., paradise compared to Manitoba. I could earn money and get an education. When I was about 17 or 18 a young woman of twenty and I had a conversation about high school. Mary had come from southern Manitoba to help with Summer Bible School, and had a high school education. I envied her and told her it was too late for me. Her reply was, "NO, it is not too late for you."

The Mennonite high school was one and a half miles from the two acre plot my parents bought in Clearbrook, B.C. I had an opportunity and was not about to miss it. The West Abbotsford Mennonite Church was a half mile in the opposite direction. We had no horses now and no transportation. I walked to school. I looked young for my age and hoped no one would notice that I was twenty and in grade nine.

Three years later I finished grade twelve. During my time in B.C. I did housework in Vancouver, picked hundreds of pounds of strawberries and raspberries, left the Fraser Valley in late summer to can tomatoes, and entered nursing school in New Westminster at the Royal Columbian Hospital in January of 1952. A full college degree in nursing was not even dreamed about back then. My goal was to become a registered nurse so I could serve others and earn a living.

I graduated three years later holding a dozen red roses to my white bibbed uniform. I continued working at the same hospital to earn money to go to the Canadian Mennonite Bible

College in Winnipeg in autumn 1955. Now I was ready to change the world.

While I was in school for these many years of adulthood my friends and cousins got married and were raising families. I had gained an education at the cost of being a wife and mother. At that time there were few Mennonite men I knew who had the opportunity to get an education. Survival of the family was more important than school.

After World War II many refugees from Russia had immigrated to Canada. One family lived in a building on our yard until they could get on their feet. So on our yard and at church I met charming young men who were looking for wives. But I had walked the immigrant daughter road for all these years and had struggled to work myself out of that quagmire and could not face starting all over again by marrying one of them.

In the fall of 1957 I volunteered with Mennonite Central Committee and went to Jordan. On my way to Jordan, when I was at orientation at Akron, Penn., I met a fine young educated American whom I married two years later. This is pretty much where my book ends.

In conclusion I want to come back to the subtitle of my book: "A Monument to Poverty." No, I'm not the monument to poverty. I'm the immigrant daughter. The monument to poverty is the house on the front cover of the book. That's my childhood home in Saskatchewan. The photos in the book on page 223 show three stages or time periods of the house, as it deteriorated. The last one is on the bottom of the back cover too – the house on its knees.

Farewell to poverty. Not just for me, but for all my siblings too. Every one of them worked hard, overcame deprivation, succeeded in business, farming, or real estate, raised their families, and were generous, giving of their time, talent, and resources. In truth Ray and I are the poorest, and we have absolutely nothing to complain about. And we recognize there are worse things than growing up poor. We would have preferred more opportunities and an education, but the school of hard knocks probably taught us more than we realize.

In the Fall 2012 newsletter, "Our Heritage," that came in the mail last week, Melanie Springer Mock takes the subtitle in a different direction. She amends it to read "A Testament to Poverty." I like that. Why didn't I think of that? My story is a validation and a testimony to my family's economic conditions. I hope it also bears witness to virtues like patience, humility, fortitude, courage, compassion and strength.~

Tina Klassen Kauffman lives in Albany, Ore., with her husband, Ray, a retired high school teacher. Tina served as a registered nurse before her own retirement. They have two daughters, Pat and Lynette, and one grandson. They are members of Albany Mennonite Church; in her spare time, Tina likes to sew and read.

PNMHS Spring Meeting

Elder Jacob A. Wiebe and the Formation of the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Church

Presented by Jerry Barkman
Zion Mennonite Church (Hubbard, Ore.)
April 14, 2013
2:30 p.m.

The Lessons of History: Shining Light in Darkness

My husband and I went to see the Steven Spielberg movie "Lincoln" at the end of what was a very difficult week for our country.

That morning, a gunman had murdered twenty children and six educators in Sandy Hook, CT. Earlier that week and closer to home, another man shot and killed two strangers at a shopping mall. Although innocents are murdered every day, and mothers weep for lost children moment by moment around the world, these deaths on our own land struck especially hard.

By the time we started watching "Lincoln" that night, my heart was sore; I couldn't stop thinking about parents who had lost children, and children who had lost their parents, and those who witnessed the carnage.

I was also angry: at the culture of violence in our country, and the all too easy availability of guns, and at the lack of voices for peace right now. That most of the movie previews focused on violent themes did little to ease my anger.

But then several things happened as I watched the film, which explores only a sliver of Lincoln's presidency, when he was trying to get the eighteenth amendment passed in Congress.

First, the movie provides a stark reminder that there have been other dark periods in our country's history, and that though this time might seem bleak, we have lived through other darkness, when violence prevailed.

I was also struck by the ways that Lincoln, compelled by his convictions and his perseverance, was able to create massive change. The southern states were deeply entrenched in a culture of slavery, one that drove the economy, influenced human relationships, and even shaped the Christian church, which condoned slavery because of biblical interpretation.

Yet somehow, Lincoln disrupted that culture, providing freedom for millions and creating a new society where people could be all God had created them to be. One man's doggedness helped to create light in the darkness of war; that darkness--the violence and loss and despair--could not contain the light, nor the hope created by the emancipation proclamation.

You're probably asking yourself what all of this might have to do with Pacific Northwest Mennonites, and why we should care about a Hollywood movie that no doubt sensationalized parts of Lincoln's struggle. Stick with me here.

The movie was a powerful reminder to me--and, I hope, to others--that light exists, even in dark times. Now, as our nation faces another bout of darkness, this is a powerful reminder.

During the Civil War, Lincoln bore that light in darkness; in the same way, we are called to be light. Indeed, perhaps these bleak times demand our action as light-bearers.

But, too, "Lincoln" suggests the significance of history, and of knowing our nation's stories both because they provide hope, and because they provide warning.

We see hope in the work Lincoln did to free the enslaved; we can be warned about the costs of violence and of entrapping others, maybe not in literal chains, but in the snares of our culture and the idolatries that keep us from being all God wants us to be.

When we sometimes get caught up in the moment, and in what is happening right now, the stories of our forebears remind us of roads already taken, and the ways our own lives can continue to bear light in our world's darkest corners. ~

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