



# Newsletter

## Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta

Volume XX Number 3

October 2017

### Remembering William Daniel “Dan” Jack (1953—2017)

by Peter Penner

The capacity attendance in memorial for the life of Dan Jack at First Mennonite Church (FMC), Calgary, on Friday, July 28<sup>th</sup>, was



Dan Jack

awestruck, as was I, by the number of board positions he was said to have held in the Mennonite world and elsewhere. One of these was with Menno Media, home of the familiar Herald Press. When he passed away he was serving as Moderator of Mennonite Church Alberta and with the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta as Vice Chair, and he was Co-editor of the newsletter. Of particular interest to me was his involvement with the Toronto Insti-

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### Along the Road to Freedom: Delving into the Journey

by Tim Wiebe-Neufeld

Renewed Exploration of my Immigration History: How the “Along the Road to Freedom” art exhibition project led to **A Day with a Diary.**

*“Feb 1 [1885] We moved to [the village of] Paulsheim from [the village of] Liebenau. [Molotschna Colony, South Russia (present day Ukraine)] “*

It was a scene I would have not foreseen in my childhood. I was sitting with my aunt Martha Neufeld in her living room, spending hours poring over the diary of my great-great grandfather Johann J. Friesen. When I was young, time spent with extended family was more about baseball games with cousins than delving into family history. Now here I was, paging through words written in the Molotschna that brought my ancestors on my father’s side to vivid life. The words had been painstakingly translated from the gothic German script and featured in a volume of historical fragments and records published by a member of my extended family. The entry above, the first in the diary, notes the move to a recently purchased farm when Johann was 33 years old:

*“Sept 15 [1896] Went to Steinfeld – took Maria along.”*

Johann’s daughter, my great-grandmother Maria Friesen Neufeld, would have been five years old at the time of the above diary entry. It was Maria’s story that had brought about this afternoon of family albums and historical records. Her life is featured in the Mennonite Heritage Centre

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Tim Wiebe-Neufeld

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Due to scheduling difficulties, the previously announced time and place has been changed.

### MHSA Fall Conference Tapestry of Uprooted Cultures

Japanese and Mennonites of Southern Alberta

- Southern Alberta Ethnic Association Centre, Lethbridge
- Saturday, November 25, 1:00 PM
- Featuring authors Joy Kogawa and Rudy Wiebe
- Enjoy ethnic songs, dance, drumming and food

See the poster on the back page for more details

## Editorial Reflections:

by  
Dave Toews

Dan, my friend, you left us much too soon, but you made the world a better place in the relatively short time you were with us.

I didn't know Dan Jack as long as many of you have, but he left a huge impact on me with his work ethic, his many metaphors, and his quiet faith. Peter Penner has said it all so well here in "Remembering William Daniel 'Dan' Jack".

Tim Wiebe-Neufeldt, spends a day with his great-great grandfather Johann's diary following his great grandmother Maria's journey Along the Road to Freedom. Come



Dave Toews

and hear Tim elaborate on this story Dec 4th at the opening program of the Along the Road to Freedom art exhibit.

Ryan Dueck tells of his personal experience from childhood through to adulthood living with and alongside people of Japanese heritage. Ryan has true insight into the Tapestry of Uprooted Cultures, the theme of the MHSA Fall Conference. And then there is the remarkable coincidence that the Smith farm had significance for both Naomi and Ryan's families.

In reference to their daughter Genine, who was born with Down Syndrome, Rod Wilson tells us their doctor said, "Don't take her home, she will ruin your lives!" Rod and Keithal had a long association with Mennonites, but it was through Genine that they came to attend and become members of Lendrum Mennonite Brethren Church.

In addition to his perceptive review of Joy Kogawa's most celebrated novel *Obasan*, Henry Dick points out an often quoted object lesson. "It seems we have not learned from history, and are there-

fore prone to repeat it". Come to the Fall Conference and hear authors Joy Kogawa and Rudy Wiebe tell of their experiences of two different cultures coming together in southern Alberta.

The MHSA welcomes your feedback, emails, letters to the editor, and articles. Contact Dave Toews at [dmttoews@gmail.com](mailto:dmttoews@gmail.com). The deadline for submissions to the next newsletter is Feb 1, 2018. See you at the Fall Conference in Lethbridge Nov 25, 2017 and at Along the Road to Freedom at The King's University, Edmonton Dec 2, 2017. ❖

## Chairman's Corner

by  
Dave Neufeldt

The essence of our work as a historical society is the preservation of our stories. At our fall conference in November we will be exploring the stories of two uprooted cultures that settled in southern Alberta – the Japanese and the Mennonites. The conference is being jointly sponsored by MHSA and the Nikkei Cultural Society, and we are delighted to have two renowned story tellers, Joy Kogawa and Rudy Wiebe, as our guest speakers. Although the interactions between these two cultures may have been limited, they would have shared many experiences in adapting as "outsiders" to life in Canada.

Many years ago as I worked to

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Dave Neufeldt

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gather my family stories I was surprised to discover that my family history in Canada goes back to about 1836. Looking through a genealogy book I discovered a reference that my 4 times great grandparents, Joseph and Maria (Yoder) Hochstetler were living in New Hamburg, Ontario at the time of their deaths. I had previously assumed that my father's arrival in 1926 marked the start of our presence in Canada.

When I was in Ontario a number of years ago I decided to explore this. I began wandering around cemeteries in the New Hamburg area looking for their graves. A man driving by saw my Alberta license plate and stopped to see if he could help me. When I mentioned the Hochstetler name, he knew of an old stone house where a Hochstetler used to live. He also knew of a small cemetery near that house and took me out to it. Pulling back weeds and tall grass in this tiny graveyard nestled in the bend of a creek we found the

gravestone of Joseph Hochstetler. With further research I was able to find that Joseph and Maria had moved to Waterloo County about 1836 to live with their son Moses. The stranger who stopped to help me was Alvin Gingerich, an amateur historian active in the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario.

Another time I was helped by the generosity of a stranger was in Indiana when I was trying to find the home of my great-great grandparents Benjamin and Polly (Hochstetler) Kauffman. Polly was the granddaughter of Joseph and Maria. The 1879 newspaper obituary for Benjamin listed him as being "of the woolen mill". My uncle knew the general location of the property, and through land records I was able to narrow it down. There are now several homes on this property. The people currently living there did not know about the mill, but one of them suggested I contact one of the previous residents. I called him but he also knew nothing about a mill. At his suggestion I contacted his older

sister who eagerly recalled swimming near some posts in the creek as a child and being told that that was where the mill used to be. She offered to come out to show me. I was so surprised when this woman who was probably nearing eighty trudged willing across an overgrown and muddy cow pasture to an even more overgrown creek. Following her instructions I climbed over a barbed wire fence and through tall, dense bushes to the edge of the creek. Exactly where she told me they would be I found the wooden posts that once supported my great-great grandfather's mill.

With the help of these two strangers, one in Ontario and one in Indiana, I was able to develop a greater connection to the stories of my ancestors. I look forward to the fall conference where I will hear more stories about what my father's family likely experienced in adapting to life in Canada. ❖

## IMPORTANT NOTICE!

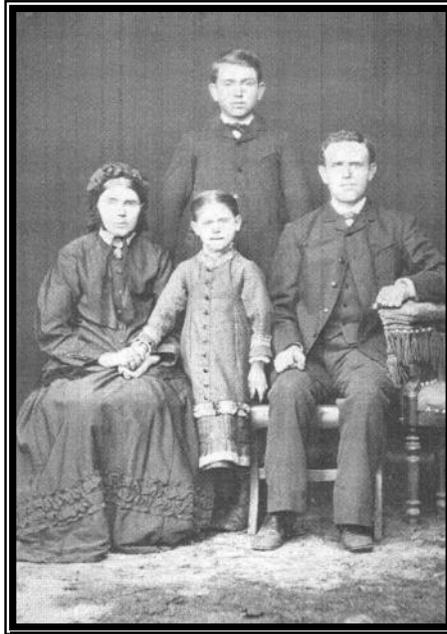
Do you want to make a contribution to Alberta Mennonite history, but do not have the patience to write history or volunteer in the archives? Do you want to support Mennonite historical research projects or help in the long-term preservation of records that document the Mennonite experience in Alberta? Then please consider making a donation to the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta, 2946 - 32 Street NE, Calgary, AB T1Y 6J7. Not only will you receive a charitable receipt, but also the satisfaction of contributing to the long-term survival of Alberta's Mennonite heritage.

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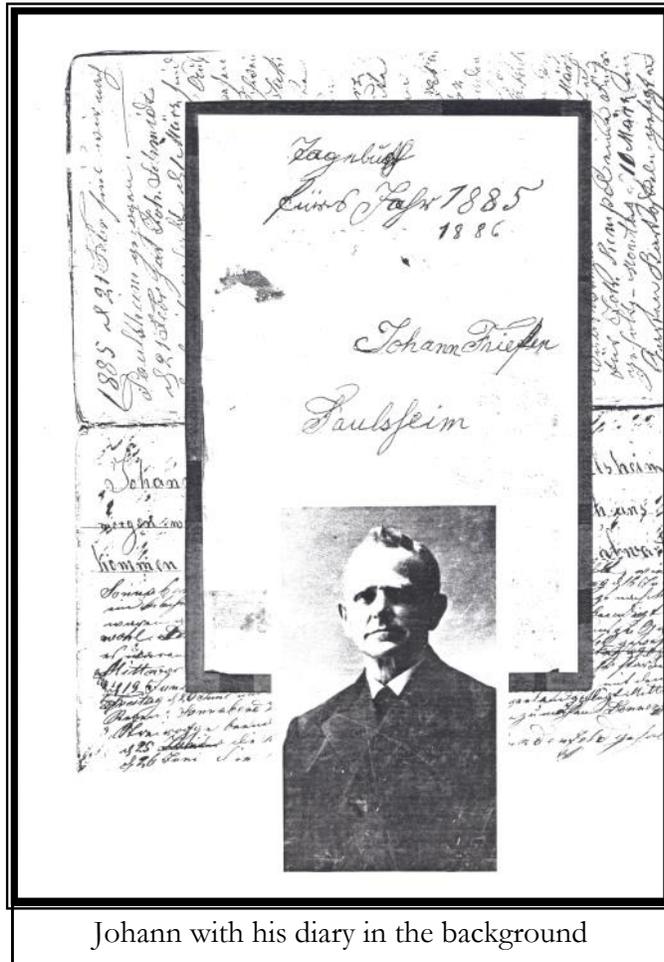
Gallery's "Along the Road to Freedom" project, a series of paintings by Ray Dirks that "tells the stories of mothers, daughters, grandmothers and sisters who led their families out of persecution and suffering to lives of freedom and peace" (MHC Gallery, n.d.A., p. 3). The painting of my great-grandmother had renewed my interest in my family history. When my aunt pulled out the diary, our plans shifted from an afternoon of site-seeing to a journey delving into the stories of my heritage:

*"June 8 [1902] Gerhard [my great-grandfather] and Maria went to Marientahl for a wedding."*

It's not that I hadn't previously been interested in or exposed to the events of my family history. My father Hugo is an avid storyteller. As a child we would sit in awe as he told us about his own childhood adventures. Interspersed with stories of fishing in the local creek or making his own bow-and-arrow sets, he shared stories of my grandparents' migration to Canada. Although born long after the move, my dad passed on the stories his parents and grandmother shared with him. Most prominent in my memory were the events that led to my great-grandmother Maria's widowhood, just weeks before her family was set to leave Ukraine. Now



Johann Friesen and Maria Schroeder, rear Cornelius Unrau, centre Maria, shortly before the move to Paulsheim and the beginning of the diary, 1884



Johann with his diary in the background

the leafing through this diary offered me a new way to enter the story of this remarkable woman and her family:

*"Sept 29 [1905] God gave Gerhard and Maria a little son, Cornelius [my grandfather]. We hired a worker and a cook for 80 Rubles."*

For most of the diary's content there is little to indicate the hard times that were to come. Each entry is sparse and straightforward: reports about the weather, crops, and other happenings on the farm; occasional mention of medical issues, funerals, marriages, family visits, and church events. Johann seldom mentions Maria except to note significant life events or illnesses. The birth of my grandfather gets twin-billing with the hiring of kitchen staff:

Even the slight notations in the diary, however, give insight into what my great-grandmother Maria experienced. Early on, they offer a portrait of a life that was challenging but also fruitful. By 1909 Maria and Gerhard had bought their own farm. The words show a strong interconnection of life, community, and faith: Pentecost gets annual mention, while Christmas entries focus on celebrations with family and friends; Bible conferences, studies, and mission festivals are reported, as are local and regional council meetings; notices of births, deaths, sicknesses and harvest frequently include short prayers or notes of praise:

*"May 3 [1916] Neufeld [Gerhard] got his call to go to Alternative Service."* (Maria was left at home with 6 children under the age of 14, but after a year, to the great relief of the family, Gerhardt was dis-

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charged.)

Prior to the onset of World War I there is little mention of issues beyond the local community. Unfortunately the diary is missing most of 1913 and all of 1914. It would be interesting to see what tales those words would have told as international tensions and conflict developed. By the time the entries resume in May of 1915, war was a reality. There are no frequent references to international issues, but many to impacts on the local farm-based community. Horses were conscripted for the cavalry. A government "Agronom (Agricultural Expert for War Production)" met to tell farmers how to improve their output in support of the war. Non-combat roles, permitting an individual to work in forestry, the medical corps, or as an orderly on a troop train also get an entry:

Throughout the war years, as before, faith in God features prominently in Johann's diary: an entry about a communion service cites the strengthening of faith in a difficult time:

*"Mar 2 [1918] The 'Red Army' were looking our place over and poking their noses into here and there but took nothing. We were very scared and thankful to God that nothing else happened."*

Towards the end of World War I, the diary takes an ominous turn. Though entries remain minimalist, the detail expands. It becomes clear that conflict had reached the local community, to greater and greater effect. Two references mark the arrival of the Red Army. Three lines on April 7 signal the beginning of German occupation. Two months later the entries stop. One line appears in early 1919, simply

acknowledging the rule of the Bolsheviks:

*"January 30 [1920] Drove the 2 Red Army men to Conteniusfeld today. Johann Tiessen from Prangenau was buried. (Typhus) Many, many people are dying of the disease, also from Small Pox. Even here in Paulsheim. "*

Regular entries resume in January of 1920. A longer paragraph speaks of difficult times. Most notable is the presence of "Machnowzi" terrorists, followers of Nestor Machno and his anarchist army. While Johann does not mention his own experiences, which included being beaten, taken hostage, and even facing a firing squad, he does note the torture-death of a neighbour's only son. While the horrors were tremendous, Johann expresses praise to God for small signs of mercy.

Over the next two years Johann's diary shows repeated reports of trials and tribulations as the Red and White armies battle back and forth across the country. Horses and other goods were seconded by both sides, with bandits wreaking havoc in between. Artillery shells fell on neighbours' homes. As many as 20 soldiers at one time from both sides demanded transport and billeting! Through all this the farming continued, with reports of harvest time, the milling of grain, and the birth of cattle.



Maria and Gerhard this picture hung in their home.

One entry from this period shows a rare bit of reporting on Maria's perspective:

*"June 29 [1920] The 'Reds' are driven out by the 'Whites' again. Mama [Maria] doesn't mind boarding the 'Whites'. They are more polite and a lot cleaner. The 'Reds' have lice, they are dirty, and very cruel. I am concerned, what happens when the food runs out?"*

What was it like to have uninvited "guests" to continually house and feed? At one point in 1921 there were soldiers staying in their home for 7 straight weeks. Intense periods of "hosting" were often followed by entries about butchering to replenish diminished food supplies. The downward trend of available supplies is made clear in reports of the price of goods. In the 1880's a PUD (roughly 43 pound bag) of wheat sold for 11 Rubles, a stallion for 135, and an entire 200 acre farm for 7,750. In 1918, however, a farm now sold for 48,000 Rubles. In 1922 Gerhard sold a few pounds of butter for 575,000 Rubles, and roughly 3 PUD of binder twine for 18,000,000. He bought "some potatoes" for 1,800,000, and a loaf of bread for 170,000. In 1923 the family traded a sheep and 200,000,000 Rubles for a small pig and considered themselves lucky to have found one to buy.

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The declining situation is marked by reports of illness and starvation. In the spring food was scarce, and seed for planting was in short supply. The few livestock left were now sick or spindly. Soldiers and Soviet “agents” continued to show up demanding room and board. In the midst of such hardship, some help did finally arrive:

*“Mar 12 [1922] We formally heard of the “American Relief”. We had our first feeding in Thiessen’s ‘Assembly Hall’ for the hungry of our village. One meal a day. Thanks be to God!”*

I can only imagine how welcome that relief food must have been!

Later in 1922, another possible remedy to problems arose:

*“Aug 9 [1922] I and Heinrich Woelk went to a meeting of the “Verband” (1) in Halbstadt. The topic of discussion was Immigration to America.”*

The decision to leave must have been a hard one. Two days after the above event, Johann writes, “Is immigration really the answer?” In the remaining

entries in Johann’s diary the question remains unanswered. While he continued to mention inflation and hunger as problems, Johann’s focus turned to the Soviets’ increasing imposition of hardships on the church and community. By the time arthritis forced Johann to give up his writing in May of 1923, Sunday church services were forbidden, authorities had replaced the school’s teacher, and the young men of the village were sentenced to hard labour for refusing to report for military service. Even so, the community continued to recognize God’s place in their lives, hosting worship services



Getting ready for the Auction Sale: Willi at far left with Father (Gerhard) beside him on the right, mother (Maria) by fence behind cow, Cornelius holding cow. Grandpa and Marie on bench under tree. (Others are workers or neighbours.)



Hans on horse, Peter, Susie and father in carriage, Willi holding colt, Marie behind fence, Cornelius holding horse and Mother and Katie behind fence and horse.

Preparing for the auction sale before the move to Canada, June/July 1926

in homes and a funeral in a barn.

In March, 1926, Maria’s husband Gerhard, Johann’s son, picked up the pen to record the last events of life in Ukraine:

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*“Mar 3 [1926] Today we are starting to work on immigration papers to go to another country.”*

Although the economic situation had vastly improved, the motivation to leave was strong. Others had gone and reported Canada to be a land of promise where “work can be found to earn our daily bread, and no one fears the Authorities. It is a land of freedom of Religion!” Receiving papers to leave turned out to be no easy task, involving bribes and months of visits to various officials. The farm was sold, and half the proceeds were needed to pay for 7 passports. Eventually the paperwork was finished and clearances received. Remaining household items were made ready for auction.

The last diary entry is June 12, 1926, and ends with the words, “Now we can continue with immi-

gration plans

Peter Neufeld [Maria and Gerhard’s son, brother to my Grandfather Cornelius, and thus my great uncle] translated Johann’s diaries. He includes with his translation the following memories of his own from July 16, 1926, just barely a month after the diary’s last words above:

*“I was 8 years old. I remember waking up in the “HinterStube” (Back Room) of our home and saw my brother Cornelius on his knees praying.”*

Based on written accounts and my own memories of my dad’s stories, I add the following information :

On that night, around midnight, a group of “terrorists” arrived at the home of Gerhard and Maria’s house. Perhaps they were looking for the auction money from the farm sale; who knows? They discovered 18-year-old Willi, another brother to Cornelius and Peter. Willi had been sleeping in the front porch. They attacked him (I remember my dad saying he was pistol-whipped), and he cried out, waking the family. Great-grandpa Gerhard looked out a main floor window, and saw his son being attacked. In my dad’s stories, Great-Grandpa then jumped out the window. Whether he jumped or fell is unclear, but what is certain is that he was shot by the thieves who then left the scene. By the next afternoon he had died.

Who can imagine what those next days, weeks, and months were like for Maria? After all the family and community had gone through, to be so close to leaving and then to watch your husband die....

Peter Neufeld continues:

*“Aug 31, [1926] After much hugging and kissing by friends and relatives we decided to leave everything behind and go to the new country Canada.”*

Part of the power of Maria’s story lies in her ability to go on. There was a 4 year old daughter, an 8 year old son, a 17 year old daughter, 3 young adult sons, and a 70 year old father to think about as they made the move to Canada together. By the end of August they had left their home and Russia behind, marking their exit through the Red Gate at the Latvian border with a spontaneous chorus of “Nun Danket Alle Gott!” (Now Thank We all our God!) Health concerns and sponsorship issues caused delays and separation; the oldest son could not get a passport and was delayed; Maria and her father had to wait in England for sponsorship while the rest went on. By Christmas these issues had been

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**Gerhard Neufeld’s Funeral**

Front row: Johann Friesen, Maria Neufeld and Katie. Back row : Hans, Cornelius, Willi, Mariechen, Susie, Peter, and Liese Wiens, the governess.(Kindermaedchen)

Gerhard Neufeld, killed by bandits, Maria’s father and children surround her and the casket.

[Notice Willi’s head bandage, possibly from the pistol whipping?]

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sorted out, and the family reunited in Kitchener, Ontario. Eventually a farm was purchased at the end of Campden Road. This farm held many memories for Maria's children and grandchildren; it was an important place for family to gather up until her death in 1954 at the age of 74.

I always sensed my grandparents deeply appreciated the country in which we live. Canada was a promised land to them. My parents, Hugo and Doreen, also instilled in me a deep appreciation for my family history. I feel fortunate to have heard many of these stories directly from my grandparents as they shared the trials of that time, their joy of a new life, and their trust in a God whom they always saw as faithful. My parents and extended family put together scrapbooks, wrote up life stories, and translated diaries such as these to give access to these stories to their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

The "Along the Road to Freedom" project has renewed my interest and provided a new avenue in ensuring my children also hear these important stories of the heritage of my family—and my faith.



Maria late in life, not long before her death in 1954

### Neufeld Family Chart

(5) The author's great-great-grandparents: Johann J. Friesen (1852-1931) m.1878 Maria (Schroeder) Friesen (1841-1911). Johann is the author of the diary.

(4) The author's great-grandparents: Gerhard Neufeld (1872-1926) m.1900 Maria (Friesen) Neufeld (1879-1954). Maria was the subject of one of Ray Dirk's paintings.

(3) The author's grandparents: Cornelius K. Neufeld (1905-1987) m.1934 Margarete (Koop) Neufeld (1903-1998).

(3) The author's great-uncle: Peter Neufeld (1918-1999). Peter was the principal translator of diary entries and contributor of personal memories.

(2) The author's parents: H. Hugo Neufeld (1940 - ) m.1964 Doreen (Dueck)Neufeld (1936 - )

(1) The author: Tim Wiebe-Neufeld (1968 - )- m.1991 Donita Wiebe-Neufeld (1967 - )

All diary quotes taken from *Diary of Johann Jacob Friesen: 1885-1926* (1998) . Translated by Peter and Katie Neufeld. Wheatley, ON: Kathy (Dyck) Rempel.

Other References used in Preparation: Epp, Ruth Neufeld (n.d.) . *Maria Friesen Neufeld (Opa's [grandfather's] Mother): Nov 15/1879-March 7, 1954.*

MHC Gallery (n.d.) *Invitation to host the touring exhibition 'Along the Road to Freedom: Mennonite women of courage & faith'* . PDF from "Download the invitation to host the tour" link, retrieved from [http:// gallery.mennonitechurch.ca/ AlongTheRoad](http://gallery.mennonitechurch.ca/AlongTheRoad) .

Neufeld, David (2000) . *The Neufeld Family 2000: the ancestors, descendants and relatives of the Gerhard and Maria Neufeld family*. New Hamburg, ON: David Neufeld.

(1) Verband - The Mennonite communities in particular, which had become well organized during earlier times, took advantage of the favorable hour and were able to effect the establishment of independent agricultural associations, specifically the "Landwirtschaftlicher Verband der Buerger Hollaendischer Herkunft in der Ukraine [Agricultural Association of Citizens of Dutch Descent in Ukraine]"

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*Tim Wiebe-Neufeld is Area Church Minister for Mennonite Church Alberta. He lives in Edmonton with his wife Donita and sons Darian and Jacob, where they attend First Mennonite Church. His interests include biking in the mountains, canoeing on lakes and rivers, and playing hockey on frozen lakes, ponds, and arenas. His work takes him to meetings across Canada where he enjoys taking the opportunity to connect with family and friends. ❖*

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(Continued from page 1)

tute of Christian Studies – an independent graduate school of interdisciplinary philosophy. How did my friend the owner and operator of SWC Eavestrouthing in Garden Heights reach those positions? Many people outside the church and family knew of Dan mostly as a specialist in custom gutter installations. This article will try to give a sense of what was said at the funeral, recognizing that Donita Wiebe-Neufeld has given a well-written obituary in the *Canadian Mennonite* (August 2, 2017).

### The Prairie Bible Institute Factor

I will begin with what I call the PBI factor. In about 1995, I met Dan through his father-in-law Dave Goerzen whom I learned to know as a friend at FMC. Once introduced, for the next decade Dan and I met monthly for an hour of his work time getting to know each other and exploring various topics of interest and concern. Chief among these was Prairie Bible Institute (PBI) where his Dad, Will Jack, had been invited to join the faculty in the mid-sixties, and where he was not well treated several decades later.

Most intriguing for me was the fact that I had met Will Jack, Dan's father-yet-to-be back in 1945. Will and I happened to be on the same CNR train from Toronto (with Harold Fuller) when he was on his way to attend to attend PBI in Three Hills, Alberta, for the first time. Due to that connection, I had always had an interest in meeting Dan and indeed did meet him in his high school years while I took two years of Bible study at PBI.

Over time I came to admire Dan for the breadth of his wisdom

and knowledge and realized that this corresponded to the shelves of carefully selected books behind me in his office and upstairs. Here was a man who was interested in more than the eavestrouthing by which he made his living. Together we explored many issues and fields of common interest.

### Intellectual stimulation

According to son-in-law Nathan, Dan had some good memories of PBI: outdoor hockey games, football in the fall, and pitching fastball in the summer. It was a special time with his brothers and the many friends in the neighbourhood.

At Three Hills, however, students like Dan had begun to resist “the power of evangelical fundamentalist language and thought along with its strictures,” as Dan's friend Aldred Neufeldt said in his long distance video presentation at the memorial. Dan's enquiring mind soon led him into philosophy and religious studies at the University of Calgary, even to continuing with graduate studies in history and philosophy of science. While exploring the field of teaching, Dan did some tutoring for Athabasca University in areas of world religions and history and the science of philosophy.

He continued to read widely – politics, philosophy, religion, history, indigenous issues, and justice and peace concerns. “He became a convinced Anabaptist and set aside the dark forms of evangelicalism”

### Family

Dan was born in Toronto in 1953 to Will and Siri Jack. Following high school years, Dan met Marguerite, the daughter of David and Margaret Goerzen of Crossfield. He was 20 when they got married in 1973. They have two daughters Charis and Bronwynne. Charis and Nathan Rousu gave them three grandchildren: Katie, Kody, and Taylor.

As Aldred Neufeldt put it most eloquently, this marriage to Marguerite who had been exposed to the “Anabaptist faith tradition meshed with [Dan's] understandings of what it meant to be a follower of Christ, as did her easy and casual way of melding together faith and practice. His was that rare model of human life blending Christian faith with quiet determinations to make the world a better place – a model that one can but admire and seek to emulate.”



Marguerite and Dan

### Entrepreneurship

Nathan recounted how Dan started eavestrouthing to pay for university studies. Eventually putting teaching aside, Dan learned to enjoy working with metals and “liked to figure out how to alleviate a customer's water problem – or how to make the home look better.” During 1982 he created his company, SWC Eavestrouthing, and settled in Garden Heights on the east side of Calgary.

During a long career, according to Nathan, Dan enjoyed meeting clients who “ranged from presidents of prestigious Alberta companies to earthy

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Italians who grew the best peppers in their back yards. There were the Hutterite Colonies who would give [his crew] a little moonshine for lunch which slowed their work down for the rest of the afternoon. He worked on many historic buildings in Calgary to retain the buildings' historical integrity for many years."

At the time of Dan's death, the advertisement for his business read:

"SWC Eavestrouthing has been in business for the past 35 years. We are a family-run business led by Dan Jack, who has 44 years experience in sheet metal construction. We are members of the BBB and have consistently held an A+ rating. We offer a variety of products and services including Steel Siding, Steel Roofing, Custom Steel Fascia, and Aluminum Soffit."

What also impressed me about Dan was his willingness to hire new Canadians, and teach them the science of eavestrouthing. According to Marguerite: "His Vietnamese employees received mentorship from Dan, and there are a couple of gutter installation companies still around that are owned by the early Vietnamese friends that he trained."

From his base in Garden Heights, Dan also frequently debated by-law and land-use issues with the City of Calgary on behalf of the community.

### ***Illness and Death***

Dan was diagnosed with Crohn's disease in 2009. This led to a slow deterioration of health and to several surgical interventions. Four years later he had surgery that removed a massive clot from his lung, made repairs on his heart, and restored his lung function. As reported by Steve Carpenter, "This surgery in Ottawa lasted 26 hours. He left intensive care on January 6, 2014, and on January 22, Dan was transported by air ambulance from the Ottawa Heart Institute to the Peter Lougheed Hospital in Calgary, close to his home."

Nathan told how three weeks ago "following MRI's and ultra sounds, his specialist declared him very healthy. Unfortunately, an ulcer had formed which cannot be detected by the aforementioned, and although he was uncomfortable and sometimes in pain, his family doctor diagnosed it as back pain [!]. In the early morning of July 14th he was taken by ambulance to the hospital, but due to the massive blood loss his organs could not sustain the shock. He was put on life support. but it was apparent that he could not hurdle this event and he died peacefully on Monday afternoon, July 17th. We will miss him."

### **Dan's Metaphor**

As recounted by Donna Wiebe-Neufeldt, "Jack gave of his passion and skill to many boards and committees." At the time of his death, he was keenly interested in being part of the Interim Council of the Institute for Christian Studies "as it continued the process of re-imagining and restructuring MC Canada."

In his "Requiem for Dan," Aldred related how Dan once contributed a useful metaphor in discussion about those future directions for Mennonite Church Canada. "He knew well the challenges to faith and the injustices of

our post-Christian times. He offered advice on working together to strengthen our congregations in their ability to present the Christ vision of healing and hope in a hurting world.

"We were struggling to find a metaphor to communicate this concept. After a time, Dan began: "You know..." I'd learned from many conversations with him that that those words would be followed by an unpredictable trail of logic across his prairie landscape of knowledge.... [but often] the logic trail would lead to a [useful] nugget. "You know," he said, "there's a grove of Aspen trees near my yard. You look at the grove, and you think it's a bunch of individual trees. But, it's not. Each Aspen trunk is tied to every other Aspen tree. They grow from one common root system. It's just one big tree, spread across the land. Maybe we could use that metaphor."

"Everyone saw the logic at once – a perfect metaphor of congregations growing from a common root of faith, breathing and working together on God's plans for us. It became the metaphor used across Canada to speak about our collective vision for the Mennonite Church as we face the challenges of our times."

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*The author, Peter Penner, Calgary, is Indebted to Nathan Rousu, son in law, for his Eulogy; to Aldred Neufeldt, Toronto, for his Requiem to Dan, via Video; to Marguerite Jack; to Donita Wiebe-Neufeldt; to Steve Carpenter, a business friend; and Dan Jack-Peter Penner conversations, 1995-2008 ❖*

## Shikata ga nai

by Ryan Dueck

To be a pastor is to often find oneself on the receiving end of what's on other people's minds. This frequently takes the form of "things that you really ought



Ryan Dueck

to read." I rarely find myself short of reading material. One person in my life recently dropped off a plastic bag full of magazine articles, newspaper clippings, and periodicals dealing with a wide range of topics related to the faith, the church, etc. There was one item that stood out immediately. It was a 1978 edition of a publication called *Canadian Golden West*.

On the cover was a striking painting of an unnamed Indian elder by artist Jon Williams. But what caught my attention was an article on page 4 by a certain Joy Kogawa entitled "Coaldale: Gem of the West." I knew that Ms. Kogawa had achieved a measure of fame with her 1981 novel *Obasan*, which chronicled the story of the internment of Japanese Canadians through the lens of a small child. I knew Kogawa was from Coaldale, but beyond that I didn't know much at all. It was fascinating to read her 1978 reflections on what would two years later be my hometown.

At one point, Kogawa talks about going along with her father, an Anglican minister, to visit two elderly Mennonite

sisters. They are listening to the elder sister reminisce about her home in Russia:

"If I could paint," she added, "I could make everything like it was. The tree over there—" her eyes were closed and she was pointing out the details of the yard she knew as a nine year old.

"Why did you leave?"

"The Communists," she said.

"They wanted your house?"

"Everything, everything."

She would have been just three years older than I was at the time of our uprooting. I too have a picture of myself as a child standing in front of a large white house. If she had asked why we left, I would have had to reply, "The Canadians."

"They wanted your house?" she might ask.

"Everything, everything," I would reply.

There is a parallelism in this paragraph that I would have barely been aware of as a kid growing up in southern Alberta, but which I would come to understand more fully over time. Coaldale was the place where both Japanese Canadians and Mennonites would build lives and communities from the ruins of war and in the face of hostility and suspicion in their new surroundings. The Mennonites—my people—fled Stalin's purges in Russia and found a tentative embrace on the Canadian prairies. The Japanese—my wife's people—were forced out of their homes in BC by this same Canada



John and Elvira Dueck's 25th wedding anniversary  
with children, spouses and fiancés 1973

L-R, R- Alvin, Art, Sharon(Siemens), Marvin, Natalie, Harold (Warkentin), Edgar  
C- Renita, John, Elvira, Ruth(Willms) [Edgar and Ruth are Ryan's parents]  
F- Carl, Emery, Rod [photo, two years before Ryan was born]

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due to suspicions about their allegiances during the Second World War. One group arrived in Coaldale (mostly) by choice; the other was forced there against their will. Both groups — “outsiders” culturally, linguistically, and religiously—would have to make their way in this place.

Growing up in Coaldale as a Mennonite in the 1980’s and 90’s was no particular hardship. I was dimly aware of my ethnic heritage—I had heard stories from my grandparents about persecution and suffering in Russia, and I vaguely knew that “my people” had come here to escape a bad “somewhere else”. I knew that my parents and certainly my grandparents experienced the “differentness” of being Mennonite in Canada much more acutely than I ever would. But kids aren’t always as curious as they should be about such things; I wasn’t at any rate. I spoke no German and had little interest in the historical set-apartness of our people (theological or cultural). This was a luxury afforded to me only in the later part in my story.

I also wasn’t as curious as I might have been about the existence of a significant Japanese population in our small town. I grew up going to school and playing hockey with Tomiyamas and Tanakas and Fujitas and Shigehiros, but that fact didn’t seem odd or lead me to ask questions about the story behind it. It certainly didn’t occur to me to think that Coaldale might have been a kind of “bad somewhere else” for the families of my Japanese friends; I did not imagine that they had been forced there — “uprooted,” as Joy Kogawa put it in the 1978 article that found its way to my desk. I had no idea that these people had been plucked from their lives on Canada’s west coast and unceremoniously dropped down on the harsh prairies by a government that treated its own citizens like enemies.

When I was sixteen years old I met a beautiful girl named Naomi Horii. Her father was Japanese, and her mother was German (a mixed marriage that I would later learn only barely avoided suspicions back in 1960’s southern Alberta). I started hanging around Naomi’s place and attending larger family gatherings. Instead of rollkuchen, borscht and sausage the table was often laden with squid, sushi, rice and chow mein. There were chopsticks, shoyu and wasabe alongside forks and knives and salt and pepper. I began to inhabit this new world with curiosity and intrigue (and very often, an extremely full stomach!).

In 1995, Naomi and I got married. I have been part of the Horii family for nearly twenty-five years. But along the way I have only accumulated bits and pieces of their story. In the early 90’s, after PM Brian Mulroney’s 1988 official apology to the Japanese Canadians, members of the family received a payment of redress from the Canadian government. I think this was the first time that I actually clued into



Ryan and Naomi  
Dueck, 2017

fact that the main reason there are any Japanese people in southern Alberta is because of racist and ignorant government policies during the Second World War. Even when the redress payment was received, however, it was nothing that anyone in my wife’s family dwelled upon. In a recent conversation, my father-in-law told me simply, “Nobody talked about it much, so we kids didn’t even learn much about the history. It wasn’t the Japanese way.”

I have found this theme repeated in many things that I have read or in conversations I have had with Japanese Canadians whose families were affected. “We’ve moved on. Yes, it was hard. Yes, we lost property, resources, the lives we had built. No, it was not right. But there’s nothing we can change now.” A big white book



Tom and Violet Horii, Naomi’s grandpar-  
ents, daughter Betty, Smith farm, 1945

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that sits on our coffee table tells the history of Japanese Canadians in southern Alberta. As I thumb through the book in general, and as I read in particular the history of the Horii family it contains, the matter-of-factness comes through over and over. The author of the Horii story, Naomi's grandfather, tells of getting married in 1942 at the Japanese United Church in Vancouver "as the war had started and the Buddhist Church was closed by the government." He says things like, "We were evacuated to Alberta in May of the same year" ("evacuated" is an interesting term to describe racially motivated forced relocation). He talks about getting to work at the Smith's farm and "starting our life together farming sugar beets with many other Japanese families."

(I would later learn, at family gatherings where my Mennonite grandparents would mix and mingle with my wife's Japanese grandparents, that the Smith farm had significance for both of our families. When they came from Russia, my great grandparents had lived in the same frozen railway cars and granaries on the Smith farm as my wife's grandparents had when they were "evacuated" from Vancouver; only a few decades separated the two groups. They spoke about those who had gone to sleep with bags full of potatoes to keep them from freezing. I remember shaking heads and smiles all around when our various grandparents made that connection one evening over coffee.)

I know from conversations with my wife's grandfather and from reading articles like Joy Kogawa's that many Japanese Canadians' first experiences in the

Coaldale area were harsh in every way and in stark contrast to the lives they had built in Vancouver. I knew that they had lost things—possessions, money, status, homes—along the way. But they just put their heads down, accepted things as they were, and went to work rebuilding. There's a Japanese expression that sums it up well: *Shikata ga nai*. It cannot be helped. What's done is done.

As I reflect upon my story and location in Mennonite and Japanese circles, I am struck by the resourcefulness and resilience of these two communities. Both faced incredible deprivation, hardship, and injustice. Both were looked down upon, in various ways and in response to various pressures, but both persevered. Both were treated with suspicion during the war—the Mennonites, because they spoke German and the Japanese because of Japan's role in the war. Both struggled with if or how they should fit in. My sense is that the Mennonites clung to their "separateness" a bit more fiercely than the Japanese, often for theological reasons. The Japanese were more willing to integrate and try not to stand out. My wife's father was never taught Japanese by his parents: "we just wanted to speak English. We didn't want to stand out or draw attention to ourselves." However, both the Japanese Canadians and the Mennonites wanted to live in peace, to make a life



L-R Leo & Frieda Pankonin, Hilda & Gene Horii, Violet & Tom Horii, Hilda and Gene's wedding Sept 5, 1970

for themselves after enduring so much struggle.

As I've spoken with my wife's grandparents and my own over the years, I've also come to deeply appreciate both these communities as examples of hard work, integrity, and endurance of suffering with grace and dignity. My Mennonite grandmother told me that she was in grade 9 when the Japanese started arriving in Coaldale. She was immediately struck by how they didn't

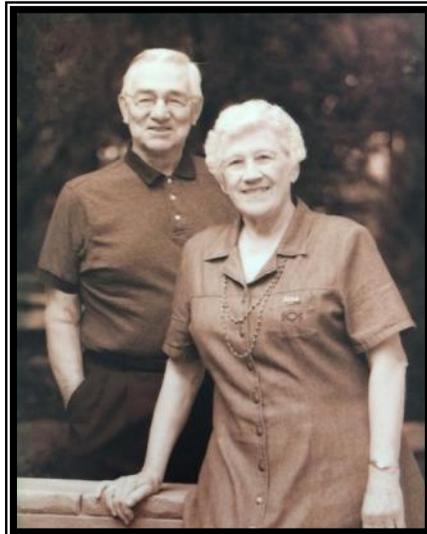
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complain, even though many people knew they had plenty of justification to do so. "There was never any griping or blaming," she said. She admired that. I do too, particularly given our present context: we are exponentially more affluent than either the Japanese or the Mennonites were in the first half of the twentieth century, yet our newspapers and social media feeds often seem overflowing to the brim with griping and complaining.

I have also been struck by the generosity of spirit that comes with similar experiences. My grandmother talked about how in those early years the Japanese didn't have cars, so they would often have to walk for miles to get groceries. My great-grandfather would almost always stop and give them a ride. "We sat on laps and crammed as many people in as we could," my grandmother said. I smile when I think of this visual—Mennonites and Japanese Canadians rumbling down the bumpy prairie roads together. My grandfather was a strong Christian, and I know that his convictions about God's commandment to love your neighbour as yourself must

have played a large role in why he insisted on stopping. But I can't help but think that he also might have seen his own people's story at least partially reflected in the Japanese experience in Coaldale. He knew what it was to struggle, to be misunderstood, to be unsure if you belong, to be persecuted for being different. Maybe he knew from personal experience how much it meant if someone offered you a hand along the way.

My grandmother added one more piece to the story. "You know," she said, "it didn't matter how many times we gave them a ride or how little they had, those Japanese people always insisted on offering us something for helping them. Maybe it was an orange or an apple... But they had to have something to give us. They insisted." This, too, makes me smile. It makes me think of visiting my wife's grandparents when I was younger and, later, with my own kids. They would always insist that we take something—a bag of Japanese candies, an orange, some cookies. Maybe it's just a cultural thing. Or maybe it's a tiny little instinct that enduring hardship and coming out the other side produces in people. Grace, kindness, endurance, humour, generosity—these things can often grow well in the soil of hardship. I've learned this from my Mennonite and Japanese grandparents. And I am grateful for their stories and the ways they have shaped my own.



John and Elvira Dueck  
Ryan's grandparents 2000

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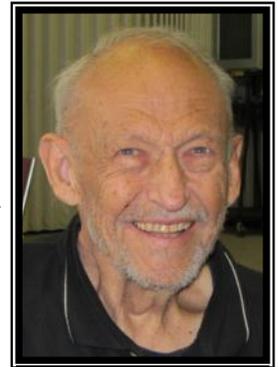
*Ryan Dueck is the pastor of Lethbridge Mennonite Church where he has served for six years. He is husband to Naomi and father to sixteen year old twins Claire and Nicholas. For the past decade, he has maintained a blog called **Rumblings** where he writes about theology, culture, and church matters. In his spare time, Ryan enjoys playing ice hockey, soccer, reading and riding his motorcycle. ❖*

## Becoming Mennonite

by Rod Wilson

### Beginning Points

Life changed forever for me and my family on February 8, 1974, the date our third child, Genine, was born. She



Rod Wilson

was Down Syndrome. The advice of our family doctor, based on his personal although limited experience, was not to take her home at all. "She will ruin your lives!"

That was not advice my wife Keithal and I were going to follow, but we did take home a child with three heart defects (holes between the upper chambers and the lower chambers and an open patent ductus), no sucking response, no grasping response, and little prospect of tracking motion visually. We soon learned that her life was precarious; we rushed her to the emergency ward of the hospital 18 times in the first 24 months. Nevertheless, she was ours, she was loved, and she responded to that love.

Unknown to us at the time, Genine's birth had started us on the way to becoming Mennonites. A second event, which nudged us in the same direction, occurred perhaps a year or two later when Keithal received a phone call from someone in Social Services. Would she be willing to have phone conversations with the mother of another Down child, a mother who was struggling with some of the issues involved. The request was

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seemed really right for us. Over the next months we may have attended a church service at LMBC, but I have no memory of it. However, LMBC was looking good at this point, and the beginning of a new Sunday School year in September seemed to present a good opportunity to find out what it was really like.

At the time there were four adult classes running, including one being taught by Rudy Wiebe. Now there was a name we knew (not merely because of his fame as a writer, but also because we were both profs in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Alberta (U of A), he in English Literature and I in Anthropology). Whatever else might turn out to be the case about the class, I knew it would be well taught.

And so we went to our first Sunday School class at LMBC. As expected, it was well taught. But what truly impressed me,



Patrick Loewen and Genine Wilson (circa 1998)

specific that the conversation be with someone currently in the situation, not someone who had gone through it twenty years ago. In this case it was a good match; our children, Genine and Patrick, were born one day apart.

And so Keithal entered into telephone conversations with Fran Loewen. These soon grew into personal visits, to be followed by occasions involving Bob and me and the four other children, our Brock and Ranelle and Loewen's Robin and Andrew. And since Bob and Fran were active members of the Lendrum Mennonite Brethren Church (LMBC), we were eventually invited to special events there. I believe the first such event was a spring arts and crafts inter-Mennonite event. Much clearer in my mind was the second invitation, to LMBC's spring choir concert. That we were truly impressed by!

Keithal and I, quite uncharacteristically, had not settled into a church home in Edmonton. None of the places we visited and perhaps attended for a year or more

what spoke to me, what almost stunned me, were the comments and ques-

tions of the people in the class.

I no longer remember any specifics, but I do recall that typical questions would be on the order of, "We were taught that this passage meant such and such, but I am wondering how we can reconcile that view with what we read in this other passage..." Or, "How do we reconcile that interpretation with the findings of this or that branch of science?" Or, "how do we reconcile that view with the experience we have recently had dealing with this issue in the church?"

To put it bluntly, and in precisely the terms that came to me at the time, I had never before experienced this kind of open honesty among Christians. In the various "good churches" we had fellowshiped with over the years I was accustomed to "open" discussion that never questioned orthodoxy and never revealed any personal failures to reach publicly articulated goals or disquieting inner thoughts that questioned traditionally received truth. These folks were startlingly different in a manner attractively challenging to Keithal and me.



L-R Rod, Ranelle, Keithal, Brock, with Genine in front, 1984

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As we moved through that fall our journey to becoming Mennonites took yet another turn. Keithal became physically incapacitated to the point that she was unable to engage in virtually any physical activity and found herself lying down on a couch most of the day. We had been very aware in the months following Genine's birth that she was not recovering from childbirth as she had previously. Her doctor's "analysis" was pop psychology - she was having trouble adjusting to Genine. A second opinion got a clear diagnosis - her mitral valve was failing as a result of rheumatic fever long ago that had not been properly treated. Our new doctor later commented that he knew as soon as Keithal walked through his door that she was in heart failure.

The deep roots of Keithal's condition began in 1960 just after we both graduated from the four-year program in Biblical Literature and Missions at Prairie Bible Institute (PBI), I went to Nebraska to work with a local church, and Keithal joined the staff at Prairie. However, during the fall months she found herself progressively weaker. Eventually she was hospitalized at Three Hills, but no cause for the condition was found. Although she gradually recovered enough to return her parent's home in Colorado Springs, weakness persisted, and, as I later discovered, she came close to calling off our August 1962 wedding. (As just one example of how weak this "mysterious illness" left her, shortly after we set up house as students at Seattle Pacific College I bought an electric can opener, a sheer extravagance in those days - as she still did not have the strength to operate a high-quality mechanical one.)

Amazingly, the competent medical staff at Three Hills had not made the correct diagnosis. Now, fifteen years later, without proper early treatment, Keithal's mitral valve was failing right on schedule. As word of Keithal's condition spread, the entirely predictable scenario (in Mennonite circles) occurred - a nearly endless stream of women bringing wonderful, home-cooked meals to our house. What wonderful gifts! At some point Keithal mentioned to one of these women (whose name I well remember) that lying in the front room gave her opportunity to notice that in her weakened condition she had allowed the walls, the windows, and the floor to get dirty. Immediately, brooking no opposition, our visitor dug out the cleaning materials and went to work to put the place right! The conclusion to all this seemed to follow without doubt - this kind of Christianity made sense and both of us wanted to be part of it!

During our years at LMBC Keithal underwent four open-heart surgeries and finally a heart transplant. The intervening years were rich in many ways as we served with Wycliffe Bible Translators in the Amazonian jungle of Ecuador and with MCC in Kenya. A down side to a transplant, however, is suppression of the immune system, leaving one wide open to cancer, to which Keithal succumbed in January 1998 at age 60.

As a kind of addendum to our Lendrum years, let me expand a little on our relationship with the Loewen family. The four of us adults became good friends and for years did the kind of things friends do including a monthly book discussion with other church families and similar social activities. Our children were friends as well and were involved in church life. But

what was conspicuously different was the bonding that took place between Genine and Patrick. Very early, I think as two year olds, both were placed in an experimental day program at the U of A. Unlike programs based on the traditional belief that Down children could be trained to do simple tasks only, this program began with the belief that Down children could truly be educated. Genine, in fact, did end up reading at a grade four level. But more importantly Genine and Patrick truly became a pair. They were so mutually involved that we sometimes referred to them as the Bobbsey Twins, wondering about which of our homes they would move into when eventually they married. That, however, was a bridge never crossed as Patrick died on January 17, 2001. Even 10 and 15 years later, Genine would comment from time to time about how much she missed him.

As for Genine herself, one could write a book. Simply speaking, however, her life was a direct testament to the active intervention of a loving God. She was not expected to live past her early teens, but somehow she came through each crisis and entered a stage of relative health. Simply as an example, for 30 years she was on oxygen 24 hours a day. For years at a time during this period the oxygen flow rates were six to ten litres per minute (for those unfamiliar with oxygen flow rates, the average senior ones sees around who is using oxygen will probably have a flow rate of about one or one and a half litres a minute). As a respiratory therapist commented two years ago, our daughter's case was so extreme that he and the other professionals had literally no

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experience with anyone like her. Just two months ago Genine's particular string of miracles ended. She was 43.

### Previous Mennonite Connections

You will have gathered from our story to date that Keithal and I were attracted to the Mennonite world for deeply personal reasons, and after some involvement in active church ministries we joined LMBC as members. Early on however, we knew about Mennonites in at least general terms, and had developed personal friendships with active Mennonites and "cultural Mennonites".

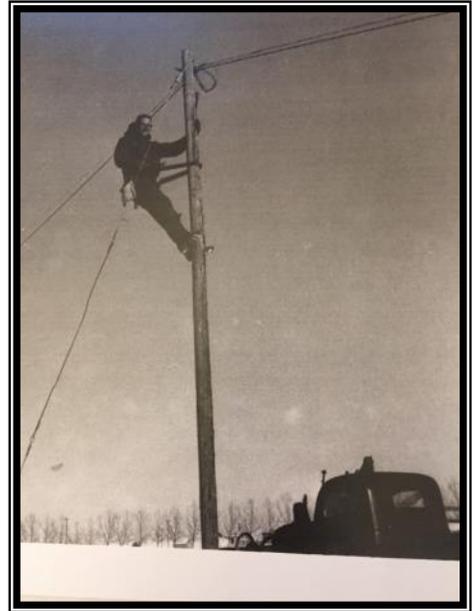
Through my Aunt Tina Lund I came to know Eleanor Neufeld from Clearbrook, B.C. My Aunt Tina was amazing. She was a noted letter writer, and so a significant figure in keeping my mother's extended family together. A registered nurse (RN), she had served with the Canadian Army in Europe during WWII. After the war she nursed briefly in Vancouver but then shortly enrolled at PBI. Next, she joined the Sudan Interior Mission and then was off to Ethiopia, where she served until a communist government took over. During the early years she served at a hospital in central Ethiopia, but for many years did pioneer work in the very isolated southern highlands.

In those early years Eleanor Neufeld was my aunt's partner, and I couldn't help but see her and her Mennonite involvements positively because of this connection. When I was still young, Eleanor recommended a church to our family. Although we were happily attending a little Presbyterian church in

Murrayville, just east of Langley in the Fraser Valley, Eleanor suggested we consider the Evangelical Free Church in Langley. It was a vibrant, growing community within walking distance, and it had a very active youth group. Some two thirds of the people in the church had Mennonite names and roots. These were the people I primarily associated with starting in my mid-teens. It was in this community that I became baptized, and among these people that I first joined a church.

It was also in the Evangelical Free Church that I decided, after my Grade XIII and a year working, to go to PBI. The pastor, Ted Handy, was a PBI graduate himself. Ted had been "gloriously saved" from the life of an alcoholic circus roustabout and long-shoreman. His ministry focused on salvation, and the church under his leadership hosted foreign missionaries and extension teams from Canadian bible schools every year. My decision to go to PBI in 1956 was individually made, but it also says something about the church that four of us went off together. My companions were Ronald (Pat) Giesbrecht, who was originally from Swalwell, Alberta, and siblings Lenore and Rudolph Penner, originally from Drake, Saskatchewan. Significantly, Pat was my roommate that first year. I might add that the following year this not very large church sent 13 of its young people off to four different bible schools (PBI, Berean, Caronport, and Miller Memorial), a remarkable phenomenon.

PBI itself had a full complement of students who were Mennonites (and even some non-communal Hutterites). My inner circle included Les Friesen and Art Wiebe, both from Mt. Lehman Road and the West Abbotsford General Conference church. Les was my roommate for two years. I certainly never thought of becoming a Mennonite then, but Mennonites clearly were people with whom I could comfortably and productively engage. In fact, I remember that very rarely did the topic of Mennonite distinctives ever arise, and when they did I was wryly amused to be arguing about the meaning of peace.



Rod on electrical gratis crew for experience & to reduce tuition at PBI, 1958



Keithal Briggs and Rod Wilson PBI graduation 1960

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I became involved in the Mennonite world through marriage connections as well. My brother John married Martina (Marti) Friesen, daughter of H.D. Friesen and Martha Enns. During Marti's teen years their family lived in Langley, and she and her siblings were very much members of our youth group. Both of Marti's parents started life in the Molotschna Mennonite colony in Ukraine. John and Marti were for much of their lives involved in pastoral ministry as Baptists (notably with Central Baptist in Victoria), but since John's death Marti has returned to being a Mennonite Brethren (MB) in Abbotsford.

My other brother, Ken, married Grace McElheran, daughter of Clare McElheran and Lenora Janzen. Although the McElheran family has been central to the local and international ministries of PBI from its beginnings, the Janzen family provided the Mennonite connection here. Lenora's parents were David Janzen and Agatha Isaac. David's family immigrated to Canada from Russia in 1890, Agatha was born in Rhineland municipality, Manitoba. The family quickly moved on to Hague, and then Drake, in Saskatchewan and eventually to Langley.

I found the character and conduct of the Janzen family to be admirable. In the 1920s David made his living by selling farm machinery. With the depression this ended since he refused to repossess needed equipment that had not been fully paid for. David had a congenital heart problem and could not do heavy work, so Agatha became the town seamstress. She was always talking to the ladies about their need for salvation and thus was asked to prepare bodies for funerals; she even tucked fragrant flowers from her garden around the body. In the evening after the funeral she would sing two hymns at a window of the bereaved family. Agatha also was the unofficial midwife and was asked for by many women. The doctor frequently stopped to pick her up, so she could help administer chloroform and assist in other ways. In short, David and Agatha Janzen lived lives of devotion and practical service.

My wife's Mennonite connections growing up were fewer. Keithal Briggs was born in the small town of Paxton, Nebraska, situated on the South Platte River in the central western part of the state, and she lived there through her grade seven. The dominant church, and clearly so socially, was the Methodist church. Keithal's folks attended regularly but also came within the ministry of a young evangelical preacher named Ivan Olsen, whose local work eventually grew into a regional fellowship called the Berean Fundamental Churches. Keithal's mother was gifted as a teacher and felt called to join the work of Child Evangelism, bringing the gospel to children. This was a bit much for the local Methodist ladies, and so she and the family were disinvented to that church. What they found, for the next year or two, was a local Mennonite church, and Keithal had schoolmates from that Mennonite congregation as well.

A last Mennonite connection for both of us was made shortly after we moved to Edmonton in 1969. Through friends, George and Geneva Kupper, we met Ike and Millie Glick. Ike and Millie were from Pennsylvania and Virginia. In lieu of US military service they had come to the then extremely isolated Native hamlet of Calling Lake in northern Alberta in 1955 to serve

two years with Mennonite Voluntary Service. The two years stretched into 12 years of extraordinary achievement and adventure, leading the stream of other volunteers who followed them and bringing desired services like schools and access to health services. In the process, for instance, they were involved in creating Northlands School Division, and Ike actually became a bush pilot. By the time we got to know them they were leading more normal lives, with Ike working as a provincial civil servant in the new town of Grande Cache, but their lives were still examples of public service flowing from wonderfully warm hearts.

### **A World of Connections**

This section, strictly speaking, has nothing to do with my becoming Mennonite. It does demonstrate, however, something of the web of connectedness that we all inhabit, whether Mennonite or other. For some time I have had a fairly serious interest in genealogy, currently with some 13,000 relatives in my computer. This computer access has allowed me to connect many details of my family's past, and to link them with Keithal's family as well.

Information has emerged about two of my paternal grandmother's brothers, Stanley and Roy Gilmore, whose family moved from the U.S. to Canada in 1903 when both boys were young. Stanley Gilmore, born in Kansas City, KS in 1896, married Sophie Walters. Sophie was born into a Hutterite community near Denhoff, Sheridan Co., North Dakota in 1903, but her family left the Hutterites after they moved to Canada

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and before she married Stanley. Stanley died in Stettler, AB in 1970, and Sophie died in Didsbury, AB in 1991.

Roy Gilmore, was born in Nebraska in 1887. It is through Roy's connection that I have discovered relatives with whom I have been in almost daily email contact for a number of years. It is also through this connection that I have discovered, in a most unlikely way, a connection with Keithal's family.

At age 20 Roy Gilmore enlisted in the Canadian Army. He was sent to France during WWI and subjected to a severe gas attack, which resulted in significant breathing difficulties for the rest of his life and a marked inability to do much work. After the war he married Agnes Blaney, newly arrived from Scotland, and in 1926 Jeannie Gil-



Top L-R unknown, Marie Wilson, Tina Lund, sitting on the cab Nina Lund, front L-R unknown, John Wilson, Rod Wilson, logging at Summerland, BC, 1939



Rod "reading" in an antique baby carriage, the house has electricity see wiring on wall, Prairie Valley BC, 1940

more was born in Strathmore, Alberta. But Roy was not much interested in being a husband or father, and so the marriage ended with Agnes and Jeannie moving to Victoria. Jeannie graduated from high school at age 16 and joined the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF). In May 1945 she attended a dance for military people in Vancouver and met a young American sailor, Elmer Sommer. They married in September. Jeannie then climbed on to Elmer's Harley behind him and, skirt flying, they were off to the family farm in Filer, Idaho (just west of Twin Falls). In Filer, Jeannie lived a busy farming life with Elmer; at age 40 she became busy in another way, when she became an RN at age 40.

Elmer's family, the Sommers, provide the link I mentioned between my background and Keithal's. The Sommers were German speaking Swiss Mennonites. Currently I have not reconciled conflicting genealogical data, but they seem to have immigrated to the U.S. about 1888. The desert country around Twin Falls is not a likely place for Swiss people to settle, but by the time they got there irrigation water was becoming available, and so excellent crops were now possible. The Sommer family was at the center of life in Filer, including the founding of the United Missionary Church (a Mennonite denomination) in 1905.

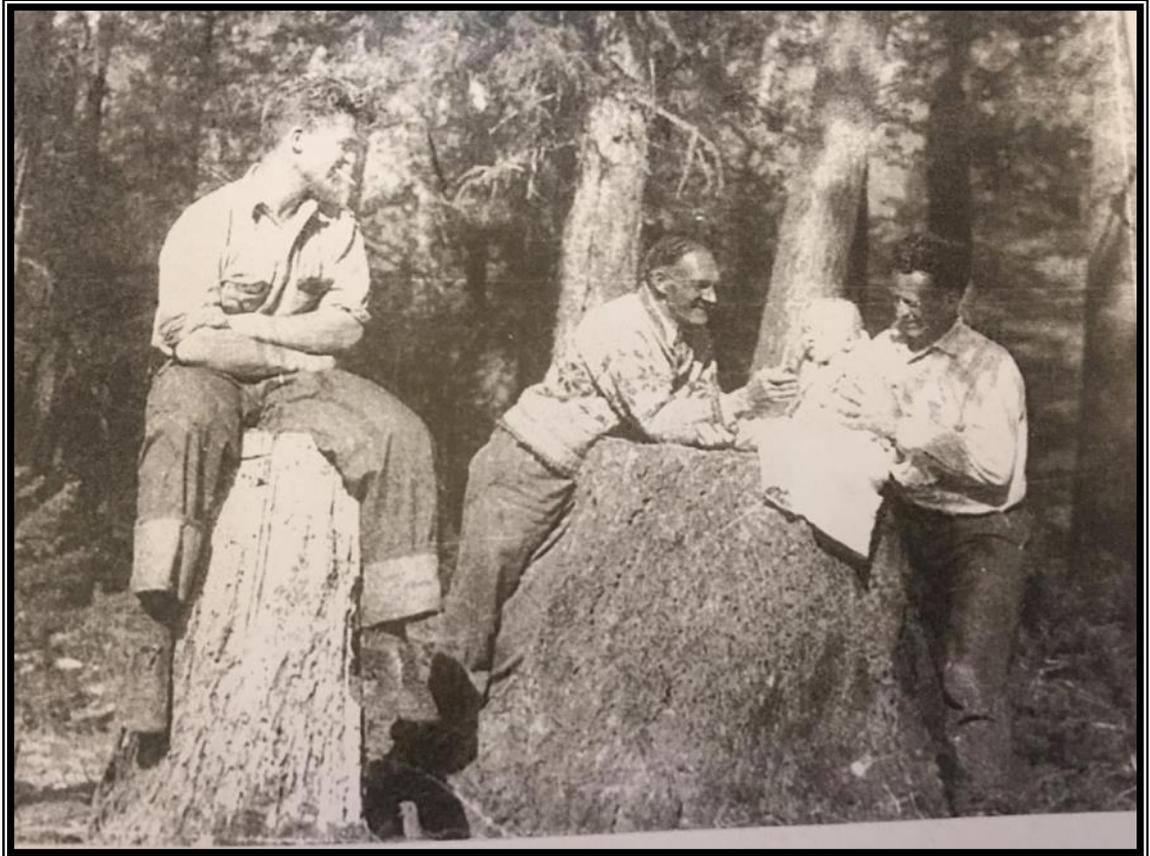
Sometime in the early 1970s, Keithal's parents, Howard and DeVere (Peggy) Briggs, tired of life in southern California and at about age 70, started a new page. They bought a piece of bare farm

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land about two miles south of Filer and started raising beef from scratch, with no buildings or fences but lots of determination. They made friends with neighbours and attended the very local church that the Sommer had helped create and where my closest Sommer connection, Elmer and Jeannie's son Jim, had served as preacher. And oh yes, as a youth, Jim had worked the very soil that my father-in-law was now working. We do indeed live in a world of connections, and sometimes distant ones come very close to home.

Rod Wilson's childhood years were spent in the South Okanagan and Boundary country of BC, in or near the horse logging camp of his father Charlie. When they were living in camp, his mother Marie (Lund) would be camp cook. After the marriage failed, Marie and the boys moved out to Murrayville in the Fraser Valley, and she resumed her teaching career. Charlie's life career was notable: farm hand, rodeo cow-



L-R unknown, Dan Byrd, Charlie Wilson, baby Rod is introduced to pipe smoking in Summerland, BC, 1937



L-R Rod, black bear Charlie snared, John, bear meat eaten, fat rendered for cooking & conditioning leather Okanagan Falls BC 1940-41

boy (first saddle bronc rider then chuck wagon driver) boxer, miner, camp cook, horse logger, sawmill owner/operator, caterpillar operator, and part-time veterinarian.

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*Rod Wilson is a retired cultural anthropologist from the University of Alberta, who mostly has been interested in how Canadian Indians have creatively adjusted to changing circumstances. He has also worked in Ecuador (with Wycliffe) and Kenya (with MCC). He has served on the boards of MCC Canada, MCC Alberta (3 terms), and the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers. ❖*

## Obasan

Reviewed by Henry M. Dick



Henry M. Dick

**Obasan:** a moving novel of a time and a suffering we have tried to forget

**Author:** Joy Kogawa

**Publisher:** Lester & Orpen Denys Ltd. 1981

### About the author

The Japanese Canadian poet and novelist Joy Kogawa is a Member of the Order of Canada, a Member of the Order of British Columbia, and the recipient of several honorary doctorates and numerous literary awards. Kogawa was born in Vancouver in 1935. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour her family, along with all the people of Japanese descent living on the west coast of British Columbia, were sent to internment camps located at least 100 miles inland. After the war, displaced Japanese Canadians were not permitted to return to their previous homes, and the Kogawa family settled in Coaldale, Alberta.

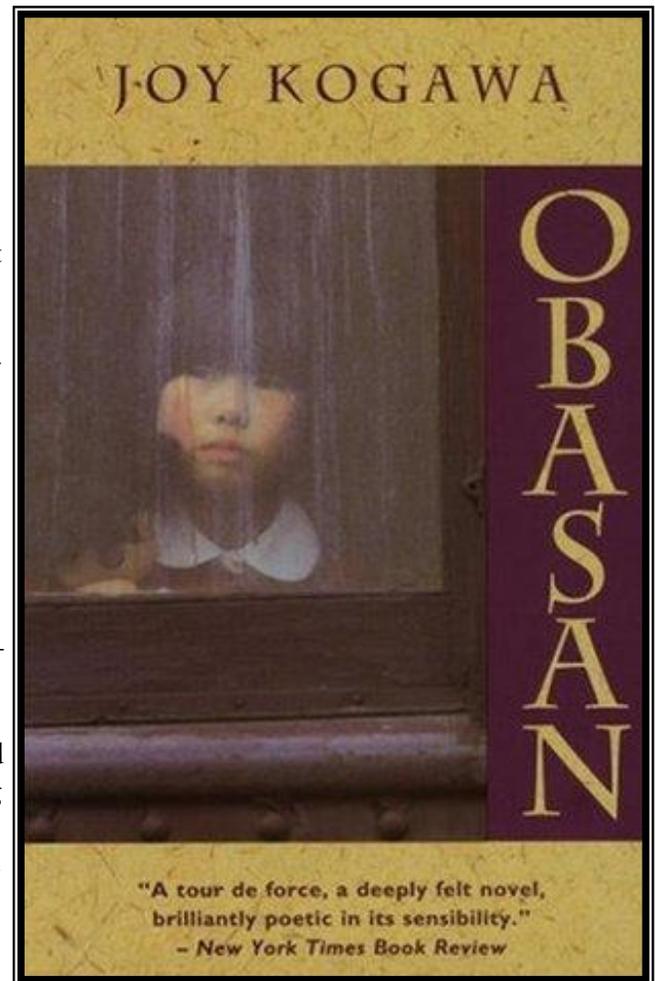
### The novel: Obasan

Kogawa's most celebrated literary work, is a semi-biographical novel providing a first-person present tense account of the injustices suffered by these Japanese Canadian families. In 1972 Naomi Nakane is a 36-year-old middle school teacher in Southern Alberta. While in Granton for the funeral of her

uncle, she discovers that Aunt Ayako (Obasan) has in her possession items such as newspaper articles, journals, photos, a scrapbook, and letters to and from government officials covering the events related to the Japanese Canadian displacement. She also becomes aware that her Aunt Emily has prepared a manuscript to address these injustices. Much of the manuscript is in the form of diary letters from Emily to Naomi's mother who had returned to Japan just before the war when Naomi was only four years old.

As Naomi peruses these historical documents, her memory returns to the events of her childhood as the Mackenzie King government puts into effect its Japanese relocation plan. The narrative is therefore a child's recollection of her comfortable life in pre war Vancouver, followed by the traumatic events precipitated by the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbour and the designation of Japanese Canadians as "enemy aliens".

Aunt Emily's diary letters provide a detailed account of the rounding up of West Coast people of Japanese origin in 1941, the confiscating of all of their properties and possessions, the confining of women, children, and the elderly to "the Pool" (Hasting Park animal sheds), and the shipping of able-bodied men to work in forestry camps and road crews in Alberta and Ontario. Eventually the women, children, and old men are relocated from the desperate living conditions in Hastings Park to further privation and isolation in abandoned mining towns in the interior B.C. Naomi's family is relocated to Slocan, an abandoned mining town in the West Kootenays. After the war the family is forcibly relocated to Coaldale to work in the beet fields. Here they are treated as slave labour while being housed year round in an uninsulated and leaky one-room chicken coop.



### Some further history and what we might learn from it

After the war the Government of Canada continued to deny Japanese Canadians a return to the BC West Coast and threatened to continue the breakup and dispersal of Japanese Canadian families in an effort to force

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assimilation. The alternative offered was to consent to being “repatriated” to Japan. Some 10,000 Japanese Canadians consented to repatriation before public protest put an end to the plan. The right to vote was restored in 1948 and a year later the last of the wartime restrictions were lifted, allowing Japanese Canadians to live where they chose.

In 2013 Parks Canada unveiled a new pavilion in Banff illustrating and describing the internment camps built across Canada at the start of WWI. Some 8,500 men, including German prisoners and European immigrants (5000 Ukrainians), were designated “enemy aliens”, torn from their families, and incarcerated in 24 forced labour camps stretching from B.C. to the Maritimes. The government-sanctioned racism, bigotry, and heartlessness characterizing this part of Canada’s history might be considered an aberration had it happened only once, but similar attitudes and actions contribut-

ed to the injustices imposed on First Nations people during Canada’s early history and again on Japanese Canadians at the start of WWII. Even today the public and social media in the U.S., and to a lesser degree in Canada, expose problems of rising racism and bigotry - the ‘enemy alien’ being anyone who is not one of ‘Us’. It seems we have not learned from our history, and are therefore prone to repeating it. ❖

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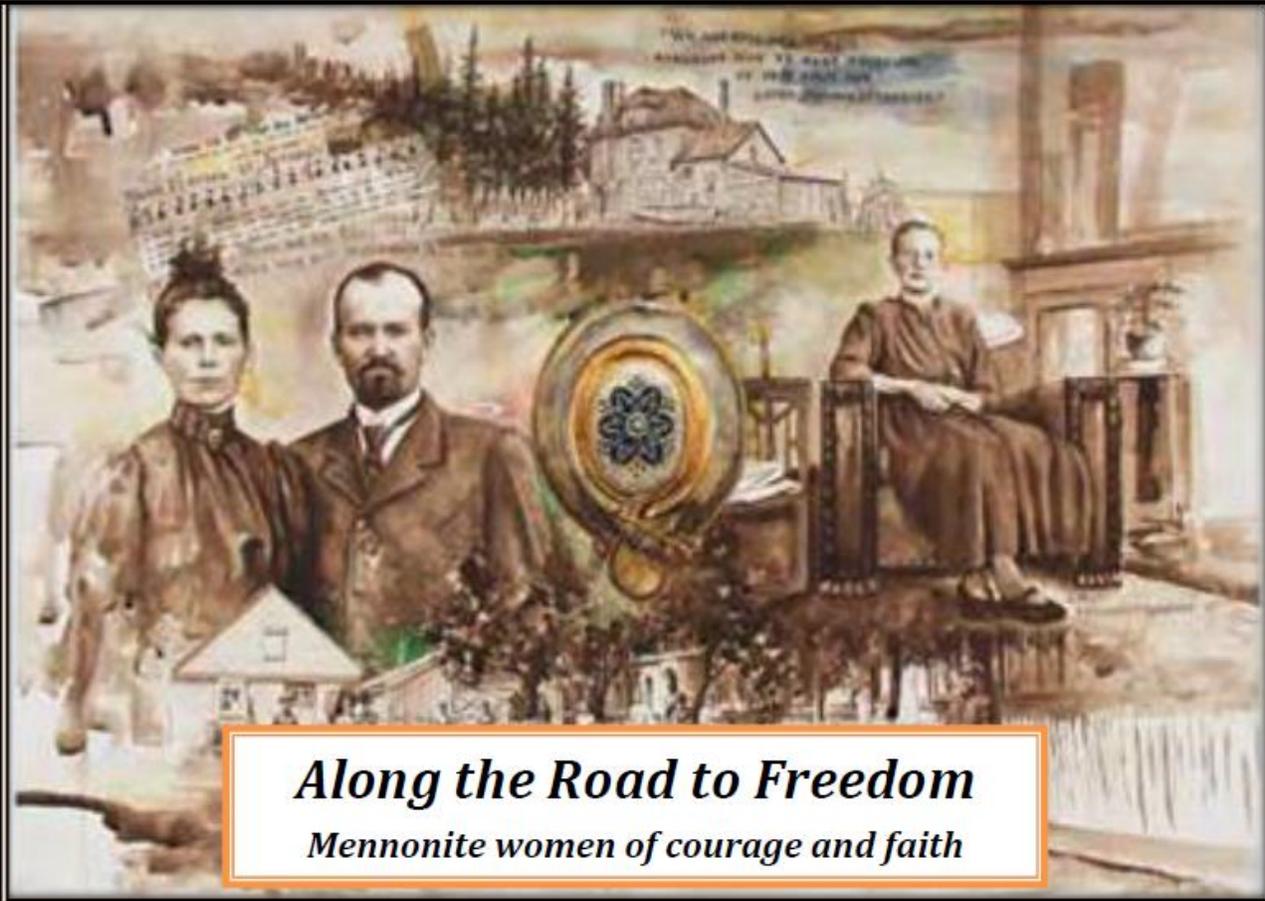
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***Along the Road to Freedom***  
***Mennonite women of courage and faith***

**26 Paintings by Winnipeg artist Ray Dirks**

honouring women who brought their children out of the Soviet Union  
to lives of peace and freedom in Canada and Paraguay

**OPENING PROGRAM and RECEPTION**

THE KING'S UNIVERSITY ATRIUM

9125 - 50 St NW, Edmonton, AB

Saturday Dec 2, 2017, 7:00 PM

Pastor Tim Wiebe-Neufeld shares the story of his  
great-grandmother Maria (in the painting above)

Choral presentation of Mennonite Hymns directed by Harold Wiens

Special Guest Linda Duncan MP Edmonton Strathcona

Donations accepted

Calgary Exhibition: Ambrose University Feb 25th, 2018

Coaldale Exhibition: Gem of the West Museum Apr 14th, 2018

Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta and Mennonite Central Committee of Alberta

# Tapestry of Uprooted Cultures

## Japanese and Mennonites of Southern Alberta

Come hear two well known authors (and others) tell of the experiences of two different cultures and their struggles as they came to Southern Alberta. As well, learn more about, and enjoy, ethnic songs, dances, drumming and food.

*Where:* Southern Alberta Ethnic Association Centre 421  
6th Ave. S., Lethbridge.

*When* Saturday, November 25, 2017

*Time* 1:00 pm.

*Cost* By Donation  
Receipts will be issued to donations of over \$20.  
Cheques are to be made out to  
Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta

FASPA (lunch) to follow

If able to attend please RSVP to MHSA at 403-250-1121 or [receptionmhsa@gmail.com](mailto:receptionmhsa@gmail.com)



Joy Kogawa was born to first-generation Japanese Canadians. She was one of many Japanese Canadians who were forcibly relocated from British Columbia to southern Alberta during World War II.

In 1968 she published her first book "The Splintered Moon". In 1973 she became a staff writer for the Office of the Prime Minister in Ottawa. In 1981 she published her first prose work: "Obasan", a semi-autobiographical novel that has become her best-known work. Books in Canada awarded the book its First Novel Award for it in 1981, and in

1982 Kogawa won the Book of the Year Award from the Canadian Authors Association. Joy has written numerous books including children's books, the latest book being "Gently to Nagasaki".

Rudy Wiebe was born to immigrant Mennonite parents who settled in southern Alberta after several years in Saskatchewan. His first book was "Peace Shall Destroy Many" which portrayed life in an immigrant community where conflicts and broken relationships threatened the peace.

Wiebe is deeply committed to the literary culture of Canada and has shown a particular interest in the traditions and struggles of people in the Prairie provinces, both whites and Aboriginals.

