



Jan. Feb. 2020 VOLUME 6 EDITION 1

Life With Us

At Niagara United Mennonite Church

The Huron Carol ('Twas In The Moon of Winter Time)

'Twas in the moon of wintertime
when all the birds had fled
That mighty Gitchi Manitou sent an-
gel choirs instead;
Before their light the stars grew dim
and wondering hunters heard the
hymn,
Jesus your King is born, Jesus is
born, in excelsis gloria.

Within a lodge of broken bark the
tender babe was found;
A ragged robe of rabbit skin en-
wrapped his beauty round
But as the hunter braves drew nigh
the angel song rang loud and high
Jesus your King is born, Jesus is
born, in excelsis gloria.

The earliest moon of wintertime is
not so round and fair
As was the ring of glory on the help-
less infant there.

The chiefs from far before him knelt
with gifts of fox and beaver pelt.
Jesus your King is born, Jesus is
born, in excelsis gloria.

O children of the forest free, O seed
of Manitou

The holy Child of earth and heaven
is born today for you.

Come kneel before the radiant boy
who brings you beauty peace and
joy.

Jesus your King is born, Jesus is
born, in excelsis gloria.

Words: Jean de Brebeuf, ca. 1643; trans by Jesse Edgar Mid-
dleton, 1926

Music: French Canadian melody (tune name: Jesus
Ahatonhia)

Editor's note: *Huron Carol* has long been a favourite carol of mine. I love the haunting melody, and the words that seem so fitting for an Indigenous version of the birth of Christ, especially during the 16th Century. I always thought it was wonderful that Father Brebeuf had written these words for his tribe of Wendat people, and I felt respect for the images drawn by the song from the history of our Indigenous peoples. And then I came across the article below, and I had to rethink my love of this carol. I still haven't decided whether I will continue to enjoy singing *Huron Carol*. One thing is for sure; I will never feel the same about the song when I sing it, and I will understand why some people refuse to sing it.

I do understand why the committee for our new hymnal has decided to leave this carol out of *Voices Together*, and respect them for doing such in-depth research into each and every song that was considered for the hymnal. My personal wish would be that a songwriter be found, preferably among the Canadian Indigenous, to translate Father Brebeuf's original Wendat lyrics into a respectful carol which could be sung in community with **all Canadians!**

~ Kathy Rempel

Choosing whether or not to include a song in *Voices Together* is more complicated than whether or not people like singing it. The song known as "*Huron Carol*" or "*'Twas in the moon of wintertime*" is one example of a beloved song that raises difficult questions.

To assess songs in recent Mennonite denominational collections, including *Hymnal: A Worship Book*, the Mennonite Worship and Song Committee has studied heart song surveys, heard stories from congregations and individuals, and considered a balance of themes and topics needed for well-rounded worship. In addition to these worship considerations, we also take into account the historical development and use of songs. For a variety of reasons, the committee, in consultation with a group of people convened to discuss material with connections to Indigenous communities, has decided not to include the song "'Twas in the moon of wintertime" in the new hymnal. This article attempts to explain some of the many complex issues surrounding this decision.

The tune of "'Twas in the moon of wintertime" is from a 16th-century French Christmas carol called "Une Jeune Pucelle." In the 1600s a Jesuit priest in Quebec wrote a text in the Wendat language to tell the Christmas story in words and images that would be familiar to Indigenous people there. That Wendat text uses terms that literally mean "sky people" for angels, "elders" as magi, and "Tichion" as the name of the star. It says the visitors "greased his scalp many times" to show reverence. [A full literal translation can be found here](#). Much later, the Wendat text was translated to French and English in ways that changed the meaning significantly.

Indigenous people today approach this song in different ways — some sing it in its original language as a connection to the past, while others avoid it because of its associations with stolen and misunderstood cultures. Keshia Littlebear-Cetrone, a *Voices Together* consultant on Indigenous material, said she felt this song was asking her to be Christian *instead* of Indigenous, rather than celebrating the co-existence of two identities.

Another member of this consultant group, **Geraldine Balzer**, reflects on this song:

I'm not sure when I first heard *The Huron Carol*, but I remember being enchanted by this carol that was so different from everything else in our repertoire. It wasn't the tried and true carols of our hymnbook nor was it the popular Christmas tunes played on the radio. There was something about the melody that was haunting, and the words captured the imagination of this prairie girl. The moon of wintertime was a familiar sight, reflecting off the snow, creating an otherworldly light in the crisp silence. The detailing of the bark wigwam and the baby wrapped in rabbit skins echoed the images shown in our social studies classes as we studied North American Indigenous tribes. In my imagina-

tion, this is what Christmas could have looked like had Jesus been born in Canada. For many years, this was one of my favourite Christmas carols, and obviously a favourite of many Canadians. *The Huron Carol* became a staple in the churches I attended, reflecting an increased awareness of the Eurocentrism of the church and the need to be more inclusive of the diversity, and was included in the 1992 *Hymnal Worship Book*. But over the last ten years, I have become increasingly uncomfortable with the lyrics of this carol, and while the melody still draws me in, I can no longer sing these words. I spent fourteen years of my adult life as a teacher in Inuit communities in the Canadian Arctic and became increasingly aware of the harm colonialism brought to Indigenous people in the Americas and the role the church played in the colonial project. While I understood the missionaries' need to tell the gospel story in metaphors that made sense to the people they worshipped with, I did not understand the destruction of culture that came with the Christian message — for too many people, the gospel was not good news. The [Canadian Truth and Reconciliation](#) hearings exposed the deep hurts inflicted by the residential school system, most church run, and increased my unease with the carol.

My unease echoes the unease of many and a quick google search reveals the musings of others that choose not to sing this carol as well as those who defend its inclusion. Ultimately, there are three reasons that I believe *The Huron Carol* in its current form should no longer be part of our hymnody.

First, the carol as we know it is not the song Father de Brebeuf wrote circa 1642, as church historians have speculated, as a gift for the Wendat people. The original lyrics were translated into French at the end of the 19th century, and then translated into English thirty years later. Each subsequent translation built on Euro-Canada's imaginary of Indigenous people, shifting the carol from a theological explanation of the birth of Christ using the spiritual language of the Wendat to a romanticized retelling of the nativity. Middleton's English lyrics are one more example of the image of the noble savage, casting Indigenous peoples as innocent children of the forest. Middleton's description juxtaposes the idyllic portrayal of a forest nativity with the images of ragged rabbitskin and broken bark, building on 19th century romantic stereotypes of Indigenous people as impoverished yet noble.

Secondly, it is that stereotypical picture of Indigenous people that I find problematic. Too often we seek the Christmas card nativity scene rather than probing the depth of the spiritual gift represented by the birth of Christ. Just as the politics of the original nativity haunt the original story, oppression by a greater political power, displacement, loss of land and agency, so too should colonialism haunt this retelling. Never, in my years of singing this carol did I know of the displacement and resettlement of the Wendat people, their loss of language, culture and tradition. I now have this knowledge.

In the aftermath of the Truth and Reconciliation hearings, I find it is no longer possible to ignore the harm Christianity, as a partner in colonization, wrought on Indigenous peoples. Where the carol promises that the “radiant boy” brings “beauty, peace, and joy” the reality has been abuse, strife, and sorrow for too many.

And thirdly, Middleton’s lyrics present a pan-Indigenous view of Canadian Indigenous people, using the Algonquin term, *Gitchi Manitou*, to describe God. Algonquin is another language family and another Indigenous group with no connection to the Wendat. Often within the colonial imaginary, customs, regalia, and sacred objects are assumed to be the same for all Indigenous groups, depriving them of their distinctness as cultural groups, with traditions that grew out of their relationship with land and place. As a result of a pan-Indigenous view of the world, agency and identity is lost, theology is tamed, and we are left with a pretty song.

I have no doubt that *The Huron Carol* will continue to be sung in churches and at Christmas gatherings across Canada, but I can no longer join it. I believe, in the aftermath of the Truth and Reconciliation hearings and the resulting calls to action, that the work of reconciliation begins with each of us, and for me, relinquishing a once favourite carol is one step on the journey.

The Mennonite Worship and Song Committee knows that Mennonite communities have different relationships to this song. The inclusion of “‘Twas in the moon of wintertime” in *Hymnal: A Worship Book* allowed many people to explore new images and ideas. For some, this song is still a needed stretch of the theological imagination, while others find it an uncomfortable mismatch of cultures, and still others experience it as disrespectful of Indigenous peoples.

There is not simply one correct feeling about this song; it is not *inherently and entirely* respectful or disrespectful. However, as the committee held many factors in balance including extensive research, conversation with consultants, and robust discussion in committee meetings, we have decided there are enough reasons not to include it in *Voices Together*.

This is our best effort at this moment in time to take steps toward reconciliation with Indigenous communities, rooted in our commitment to pursuing the just peace we learn from Jesus.

The above article was posted by Katie Graber & Geraldine Balzer, members of Intercultural Worship Committee of the Voices Together project. For more information, please check Mennonite Church Canada or mennoniteusa.org ~ compiled by Kathy Rempel

The following is a **literal translation** of the Huron Carol from the Wendat-Huron to English language. Translation by John Steckley/Teondecheron . This translation says in English ‘exactly’ what Father Brebeuf said to his Wendat friends—not in poetic form.

Huron Carol

**Have courage, you who are humans; Jesus, he is born
Behold, the spirit who had us as prisoners has fled
Do not listen to it, as it corrupts the spirits of our minds
Jesus, he is born**

**They are spirits, sky people, coming with a message for us
They are coming to say, "Rejoice (Be on top of life)"
Marie, she has just given birth. Rejoice"
Jesus, he is born**

**Three have left for such, those who are elders
Tichion, a star that has just appeared on the horizon leads them there
He will seize the path, he who leads them there
Jesus, he is born**

**As they arrived there, where he was born, Jesus
the star was at the point of stopping, not far past it
Having found someone for them, he says, "Come here!"
Jesus, he is born**

**Behold, they have arrived there and have seen Jesus,
They praised (made a name) many times, saying "Hurray, he is good in nature"
They greeted him with reverence (greased his scalp many times), saying 'Hurray'
Jesus, he is born**

**"We will give to him praise for his name,
Let us show reverence for him as he comes to be compassionate to us.
It is providential that you love us and wish, 'I should adopt them.'"
Jesus, he is born.**

(Taken from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls)



First Nations, Inuit, and Métis women and girls in Canada have been the targets of violence for far too long. This truth is undeniable.

The fact that this National Inquiry is happening now doesn't mean that Indigenous Peoples waited this long to speak up; it means it took this long for Canada to listen. More than 2,380 people participated in the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, some in more ways than one. Four hundred and sixty-eight family members and survivors of violence shared their experiences and recommendations at 15 Community Hearings. Over 270 family members and survivors shared their stories with us in 147 private, or in-camera, sessions. Almost 750 people shared through statement gathering, and 819 people created artistic expressions to become part of the National Inquiry's Legacy Archive. Another 84 Expert Witnesses, Elders, and Knowledge Keepers, front-line workers, and officials provided testimony in nine Institutional and Expert and Knowledge Keeper Hearings. The truths shared in these National Inquiry hearings tell the story – or, more accurately, thousands of stories – of acts of genocide against First Nations, Inuit and Métis women and girls. This violence amounts to a race-based genocide of Indigenous Peoples, including First Nations, Inuit, and Métis, which especially targets women and girls. This genocide has been empowered by colonial structures, evidenced notably by the Indian Act, the Sixties Scoop, residential schools, and breaches of human and Inuit, Métis and First Nations rights, leading directly to the current increased rates of violence, death, and suicide in Indigenous populations.

The **red dresses** were featured across Canada to honour and represent indigenous women who are gone, but not forgotten. Using red dresses was the brainchild of Winnipeg-based Metis artist Jaime Black, who created the **REDress Project** five years ago.



Red dress rally on Parliament Hill in support of Murdered & Missing Indigenous women & girls.



Red Dress Earrings & Necklace handcrafted by **Niska Artisans** were sold at MCC Peace Conference in St. Catharines.

Youth H2O

Pikangikum First Nation



MCC will install a holding tank in the community to bring clean, potable water. We invite you to join with us and support the youth in this remote community. Go to mcco.ca/indigenous-water for more info.



Across Ontario, the Indigenous Neighbours program facilitates reconciliation through relationship, art, and advocacy. We help share culture by supporting Indigenous artists through the **Niska program**, and help address issues of systemic poverty by advocating for **food sovereignty**, sustainable livelihoods and **clean, safe drinking water**. We are actively responding to the Calls to Action put forward by the **Truth and Reconciliation Commission** to begin the processes of healing and peacebuilding with Indigenous partners.

Youth H2O - Pikangikum First Nation

Pikangikum First Nation is a remote community where close to 75 percent of the population is between the ages of 0 and 25 and where, annually, the greatest number of youth worldwide are taking their lives. At the request of Chief Dean Owen and the Council of Pikangikum First Nation, MCC will be installing a holding tank in the community arena to bring clean, potable water to children, youth and young adults. We invite you to join with us and support the flowing of dignity to youth in this remote community. For more info, go to mcco.ca/indigenous-

MCC celebrates its 100th birthday in 2020!



Since 1920, MCC has worked with the church, partner organizations and supporters. We share God's love and compassion by responding to basic human needs and working for peace and justice. We started by helping families affected by war and famine in southern Russia (present-day Ukraine). We now work in more than 50 countries around the world.



One day. Multiple locations. Thousands of stitches of hope and warmth.

Get involved with something big—record-breaking big! Help us touch the lives of people in need while celebrating MCC's 100th anniversary. We're attempting to collect 6,500 comforters to deliver to people affected by conflict and disaster around the world.

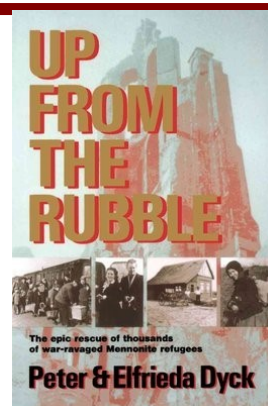
We need your help to reach our goal of 6,500 handmade comforters on January 18, 2020.

(NUMC's Day of Winter Warm-Up is Saturday, Jan. 18, 2020 at 8:30 a.m. till noon.)

Up From the Rubble - by Elfrieda & Peter Dyck

The story is told by both Peter and Elfrieda; they alternate chapters or sections of chapters, so we hear both of their experiences in their own words. They tell us how they separately went to England through the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) during World War II in response to a call they heard from the church and ultimately from God. While working in England they met, fell in love, and were married. From England they moved to the Netherlands to do relief work (distributing clothing and food) after the war. It was there they came in contact with the first Mennonite refugees they would help.

This book tells the story behind the support given by Mennonites in the US and Canada in response to the great need of Mennonite families in Russia and as refugees leaving Russia, Germany, Holland to life in Canada, Paraguay, Uruguay, and USA. **MCC at work!**



M.C.C. Home in Asuncion ~ submitted by Lani Gade

The letters M.C.C. became familiar to me in my early childhood right after the war in Germany. At first they meant packages with all sorts of goodies wrapped in a fluffy new towel. As I understood it, they came from MCC, but who or where that was, I didn't know and didn't really care. When we were on the ship to Paraguay Elfriede Dyck, who led the transport, became the embodiment of MCC for me. I thought she looked so smart in her navy blazer. I admired her then and admire her even more today. (Just imagine, she was a very young woman taking on the responsibility to lead a big transport group of refugees across the ocean to a foreign land, and that in an era, where communication was very poor and difficult.)

Once in Paraguay, the towel packages kept coming for a while. It was always a great joyful event, because we didn't have very much.

But it wasn't until I was twelve years old and my family moved to Asuncion, that MCC, or rather an institution of MCC, became very important in my life. Asuncion is the capital of Paraguay and at that time MCC had their head office for all South America there. In 1950 just a few Mennonite families lived in Asuncion, the different colonies had their representatives there and there were a few young girls and some young men that had come looking for work to help their parents out at home in the colonies. But for this small Mennonite community in a then foreign surrounding and a new language, the MCC home or just Home or just MCC as we came to call it, became the center of our city life. Starting from renting a small building, in time MCC had acquired a big building with quite a bit of property. So there were a few rooms for people from the colonies to stay in for a small fee when they had business in the city, or were traveling through or had to see a doctor. For that they employed a nurse who could accompany the patients and help out with the language. They had a full staffed kitchen, so that visitors and staff could have all their meals there. To oversee all this they had a couple from Canada. We called them home parents. The first ones I got to know were Peter and Helen Epp from Leamington. They were a wonderful couple and so right for the job. Everybody called them Mom and Pop. They would help the young girls to find a job, mostly domestic, and be there for them if things didn't work out. They made sure that the girls had Thursday afternoon off and if possible, their day off would be Sunday. On Thursdays they were encouraged to come to the Home for an afternoon of activities and fellowship. MCC looked after our mail too. Everybody's mail would go to the MCC mailbox and they in turn would sort it out and put it in our individual slots at the Home. Casilla de Correo 166 was everybody's address in Asuncion. And if we had mail to send, we would take it to the MCC office. The Home became well known to a lot of the Paraguayan population. If you were lost in the city or arrived at the airport, you just asked for casa mennonita and any taxi driver would take you there.

So the MCC Home became very important to all Mennonites in Paraguay, but most important to our small Mennonite community in Asuncion. The Home was the center of our social activity. I had high-school classes in the afternoon, from there I would go straight to choir practice at the Home on Thursday evenings. Not to worry about supper, they would give me something to eat. The small ladies' group would meet there once a week. We held DVBS there and even funerals. But when the boys' home in Asuncion was established, that gave our youth group quite a boost and became more interesting for us girls. The colonies found it important to have a place in Asuncion for boys to go to school to learn the language or to specialize in certain professions, especially teachers. MCC would organize picnics and outings for the youth. Once a year they prepared a really nice dinner for us. It was great fun!



Our small Mennonite congregation (GC, MB and everybody in between) rented a church for our Sunday services. But we could only have it in the afternoon. So at 4 o'clock we had our church service and then everybody walked to the MCC Home. Nobody had a vehicle of any kind, not even a bicycle. Sometimes we would hitch a ride on the back of the MCC pickup. At the Heim we would get free refreshments. I remember bread and Mortadella sausage, juice or coffee and cookies or squares. Later in the evening there was always a program planned. But most important was the socializing. The ladies would sit somewhere in a circle and talk about housework and family. The men would stand somewhere in a circle and discuss politics and world affairs (what else!) And we, the youth, had our special spot where we met. There was a low wall to separate the wide driveway from the yard, that's where we girls would sit and the boys would stand in front of us and try their best to look smart. Well, it must have worked, because quite a few couples found each other by the wall at the MCC on Sunday evenings. That's how it was for Waldemar and me too. We even had our wedding reception at the Heim. Waldemar's family had left for Canada before that and so had my parents. I stayed behind, finished school and then we got married. We were both very young with no family close by to assist us, but the staff of the MCC Heim did a great job.



The wall where the youth sat and built relationships in 1950's is now covered in lovely greenery—no more romances happening here!?

We didn't realize it then so much, but in retrospect we see it now, what a difference MCC has made in our lives, especially in those years in Asuncion. We are very thankful for that.

~ Lani Gade

A childhood memory from 1947

It was after the Second World War and my mom and I were refugees like so many others in Germany. My father had been drafted into the German army and never returned to us.

Peter and Elfrieda Dyck were organizing an MCC camp in Berlin and mom and I were some of the first refugees there. Since I had the measles, I was kept separate in a dark room for three weeks until I was better and would not infect other children. Don't know if this procedure worked.

Life in Berlin was good! We had enough to eat, had school every day, lots of other children to play with and I have even grown old with some of them. One night at supper, a lot of whispering was going on among the adults. Back in our room my mom was packing our belongings, took me by the hand (I could always tell by her tight grip how serious the moment was) and we went outside. All the other refugees were there with their bundles. It was so cold, so dark and oh sooo quiet. We were lifted onto big American army trucks driven by big black American soldiers. I had never seen people of colour before.

The next stop was a railroad station where we were put into boxcars with straw on the floor. I don't know how long that trip lasted, but when the boxcar doors finally opened I saw a huge ship with many happy people on deck. It was very cold and my mom's grip on my little hand was tight as the gangway onto the big ship was rather wobbly. We were welcomed with a mug of hot coffee with cream and a lot of sugar. That was my first cruise at the age of seven.



A tight grip!

THANK YOU, MCC !!!!!!!

Valentine Bartel



MCC answers a child's prayer

I was a little girl when we were refugees after WWII in West Germany.

We were my parents and first five then six children.

MCC sent help and my parents had the responsibility to list all the Mennonite refugees in our area.

All the shipments of food and clothes, even Christmas bundles were sent to our house and people came to receive their part.

Since our apartment was small, all the big bags of groceries were put in our bathtub. Then my parents weighed and parceled them for everyone.

The clothes were usually in a pile and people could select what would fit them or their children.

That is when I experienced my first answer to my own prayer: My grade 2 or 3 class were going on a trip to the Harz Mountains area. But my shoes were falling apart and I would not be able to go.

Next day, the day before the trip, a shipment from MCC was due. I hid behind a door in our crowded apartment and prayed.

And there was a pair of shoes, a bit too long for my feet, but they could be tied and I could walk very well in them!

The Christmas bundles were piled in my parent's bedroom.

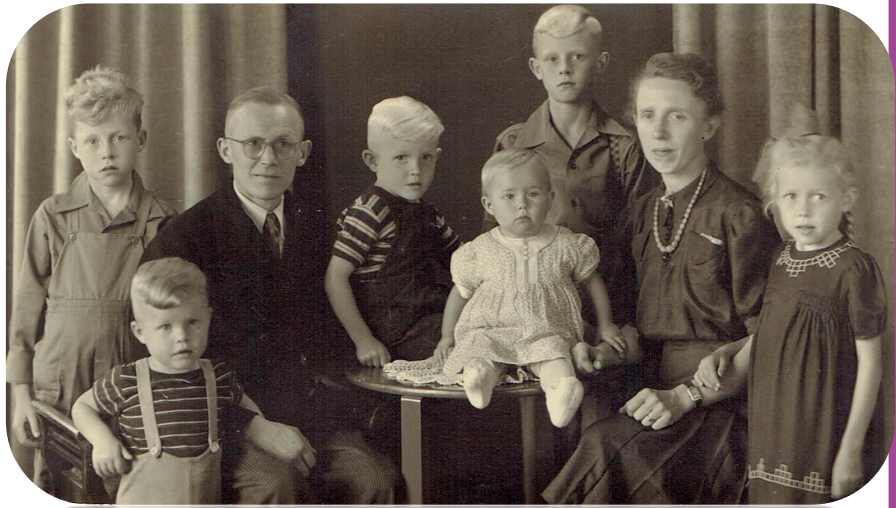
One day I saw the head of a little baby doll sticking out of one bundle.

The bundles contained some clothes, toiletries, and a toy, wrapped in a towel and closed with safety pins. They were listed by ages of the children. This parcel was probably for a smaller child, but I begged my parents, and finally they kept that bundle for me.

Later my Aunt helped me to sew a little pink night gown for it. This was my first sewing project.

Before we emigrated to Uruguay, we all received more clothes and other things from MCC.

~ submitted by Ingrid Dau



1947, Salzgitter. The boys' t-shirts look very American



My sister and I are wearing flowery cotton dresses from MCC. 1951, Salzgitter



Children in Germany receiving MCC bundles.
How exciting and encouraging for them and their parents!

MCC Helped Shape Our Lives

We are very thankful to this day for the help that MCC provided to our family over the critical years after World War II.

Our mother, my sister Marianne and I were living in Schmachtenhagen, a village which was cottage country for people living in Berlin, located in the Eastern Section which was the

Russian Zone when Berlin was divided up into four Sectors. Since we were registered as "Mennonites", we received quite a few "Care Parcels" between 1946 & 1949. Included in these parcels were clothing, spam meat, health kits with Colgate toothpowder which we used sparingly, and other essentials. If the parcel included coffee, our mother would sell it so she could buy bread instead. These parcels helped to sustain us as food was very scarce.

The MCC office was located in the Western Zone, and it was very difficult at the time to go from one Zone to the other by train, and our mother was always very nervous at these times. In May 1949 we were notified by MCC that there was a chance to go West via a US Military plane. Our mother had to make a quick and desperate decision, taking Marianne out of the hospital, before she was scheduled for eye surgery the next day. We gathered a few belongings and left as the deadline for having a chance to leave the Russian Zone during the Berlin Blockade was imminent. This was called the "Berlin Airlift" to the West during the International Crisis of the Cold War. If our mother had not made the decision to leave, we would probably have been living in East Germany until November 1989. There is a "Monument for Remembrance" of this event in Berlin and Frankfurt.

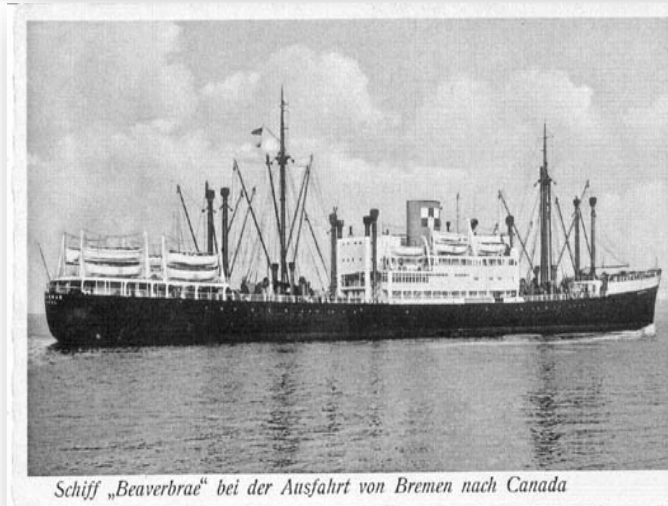
MCC also helped us to immigrate to Canada in 1952. We had to get a health check-up, and approval for immigration in Gronau, a camp which we had already visited in 1949, where many other refugees from the Ukraine had been earlier in 1948/1949. When we boarded the ship "Beaverbrae" in Bremen in August, we did not know our destination. Our few immigration boxes were labeled for Saskatoon, Sask. When we arrived in Quebec City after all our papers were inspected, we boarded a train to Toronto. While on this train, a representative from MCC who was travelling with other immigrants from the ship, approached my mother and told her that we were going to the Niagara area, one of the nicest areas in Canada. He also told her that there was a sponsor, and arrangements had been made by him for our accommodation. To our mothers' surprise she found out that there were a few families she had known in Westprussia, already living in Niagara. That was a blessing.

When we look at our life, we would say that our future was somehow shaped by MCC.

Marianne Epp and Hannelore Harder



Marianne Epp
1947

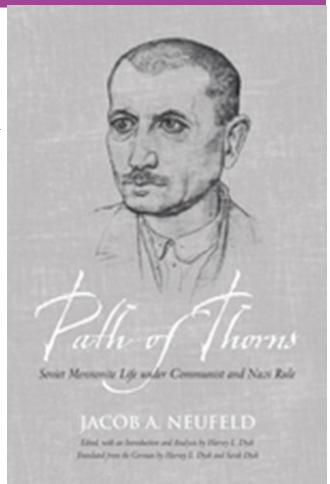


Schiff „Beaverbrae“ bei der Ausfahrt von Bremen nach Canada



Hannelore Harder
1948

An unexpected telephone call last spring from Ron Funk of Vineland, resulted in the comment that Ron's father, Walter, had never received a copy of my Grandfather's book Path of Thorns: Soviet Mennonite Life under Communist and Nazi Rule. As Walter Funk was a long-time friend of my father, Jacob Neufeld, I could only happily oblige. In December 2019, my daughter Ali and I met with Walter. What follows next is an interpretation of a true story as told by Walter Funk. Part One... this time.



It was the springtime of 1940 when the winter had finally loosened its icy grip on the steppes of the southern Ukraine. The promise of spring was in the air with the return of warmer temperatures and the many fruit trees in the tiny gardens in the once prosperous village of Gnadenfeld were about to burst into bloom. All was well it seemed, at least on the surface, yet somehow the pleasantness of the season had been undermined by a hidden and unexplainable darkness.

A 45 year old Jacob Abramovitch Neufeld sat at his desk early one morning, thinking deeply about the tumultuous events of the past 20 years. Staring, seemingly trance-like at the front entrance of his small accounting office of the recently formed “Karl Marx Collective Farm”, all the while his mind churned from the seemingly endless emotional and physical scars left on his beloved Mennonite people. Nothing now was as it once was, nor was it as it should be.

A visual reminder of his own physical scars was never far away. Jacob's intense gaze turned suddenly from that front door, to the nearby coat rack where he and others would hang their coats every morning. His two ever-present walking canes hung on a hook, and bore easy witness to the cruelties he had endured some years earlier. Walking without those canes was now impossible. And even with them, chronic pain and awkwardness prevailed in each of his movements. In his thoughts, Jacob recalled that it had only been the year before, in 1939, that he had returned to his family in Gnadenfeld, after 6 years in a Soviet work camp six time zones away, near the Soviet-Chinese border. The false accusations, the relentless beatings, the deprivation of food and the constant threat of death had all taken its mental and physical toll. He had returned only by God's grace and Jacob knew that; but he returned as a broken, crippled man. Many, many others did not return. His countrymen had paid a steep price for a revolution that had promised so much yet delivered only turmoil, chaos and death. Jacob let out a weary sigh.

“What will happen now?” he thought.

Jacob's quiet reflection was suddenly broken when Franz Funk bounded with his usual energy through the front door and belled out a morning greeting: “*Goode Morje!*” 10 years younger than Jacob, Franz had a youthful and endearing enthusiasm in his demeanour. And an easy smile. There was frequent communication between the two and Jacob looked forward to Franz's daily meanderings into the office where Jacob worked. The two always conversed in their familiar *Plautdietsch*. Desperately seeking safety and refuge from an increasingly forced Sovietization of all things, the Funk family had recently relocated to Gnadenfeld from a Mennonite settlement much further to the east. Jacob and Franz had become fast friends when the latter had joined the collective as one of the farm managers. Franz's responsibilities included overseeing the Collective Farm's Machine Shop -local Communist Party officials called it a “Model of Soviet Innovative” when the shop was in fact a small abandoned factory building that had fallen into severe neglect when its former Mennonite owner had the sudden opportunity of leaving all this chaos behind and migrating with his family to Canada in the mid-1920's. At some point in time, part of its roof had caved in, and its glory days were now well behind it. The factory lay abandoned, unused and overgrown for well over a decade and it now contained the meagre equipment holdings of what was to be a great collective adventure.

Franz often recounted to Jacob, lighter stories of the happenings within the Funk family. But not today. The business of the day was at hand. Jacob reminded Franz of a previously arranged meeting that both of them had to attend. Franz affirmed the reminder and promptly hung his shop apron up in its usual spot on a hook, next to Jacob's walking canes.

An official letter from the People's Commissariat for Agriculture (Department Of Agriculture) in Moscow arrived in the mail some weeks before. Getting mail itself was unusual in those days, and mail from the government even more so and regarded suspiciously. The letter detailed the impending visit from Moscow of a senior Department official, currently on tour of the area's collective farms. The entire visiting delegation would include a bureaucrat from Moscow, a member of the local Agricultural Board and finally an individual representing the local workers union. Those in attendance from the Collective would include four managers (including Funk and Neufeld).

Originally, Franz had discounted the entire request as frivolous. The older and wiser Jacob, who was accustomed to the usual prefabricated façades that the Soviets did so well, thought otherwise.

Today was the day, and this was the time.

Once again Jacob sighed: “Protect us, Father God, from what will happen now.”

To be continued...

MCC Canned Meat Saves Lives

My mother had a story about receiving MCC canned meat as a child in Germany after World War II. Those were lean years, when hunger was more widespread than during the war itself.

My mother was born in 1939 in the distant east of Germany as it existed at that time. Her parents had bought a farm in a village near Königsberg (now Kaliningrad, Russia) and moved there from the Vistula delta south of Danzig (now the Polish city of Gdansk), some years before.

She was the second-youngest of eight children, and didn't know her father for long before he disappeared in the maw of military duty, never to return.

Her memories of her first home were vague; likewise, her description of the overland journey my grandmother undertook in stages to bring her children to safety when the dangers of war came closer. She couldn't remember when they reached Danzig, but March 21, 1945 was a day she would never forget. It was her 6th birthday, and on that day, her immediate family and some relatives boarded a ship and set sail across the Baltic Sea for the city of Kiel in the west.

From there, all those who had fled Danzig were dispersed among towns and villages whose inhabitants were assigned a certain number of refugees to host according to the size of their homes. My mother's family ended up on a farm in rural Schleswig-Holstein where they had just one room to themselves but dozens of other children to play with. Here, at last, my mother could go to school, which she loved.

For the farm owners, it must have been a challenge to house and feed all the families they were required to host. The post-war years in Germany were characterized by food shortages and inflation, and my mother learned early to forage for mushrooms and berries in the local fields and forests. One of her food-related memories was of sitting on a hay wagon in the barn with the other farm children, practising their multiplication tables while peeling and eating the turnips that were meant as feed for the cows.

Much as my mother loved school, she ended up missing a lot of it because of illness that, no doubt, was exacerbated by malnutrition. She spent weeks and weeks in bed, spending her time reading the only book her mother had to offer – an illustrated Bible. When my grandmother finally consulted a doctor about her sick child, he said, “She's starving; feed her!”

Around that time, MCC workers somehow located and made contact with Mennonites who had been resettled in the area. They distributed canned meat and material aid (such as clothing) and, as time went on, also helped many families emigrate to Canada.

Those of us who have participated in the MCC meat canning, which goes on to this day, know that the cans are densely packed with meat intended to be used in stews or other dishes in portions large enough to feed a crowd. My mother remembered my grandmother allowing her to eat the meat directly from the can with a spoon.

Too young at the time to fully understand the implications of her mother's generosity, my mother only knew that this was a special privilege, and she cherished the memory for the rest of her days. Telling the story to her own children, years later, she credited MCC meat with saving her life.

Eventually, my mother's family would be sponsored by Mennonites from Vineland to come to Canada, where my parents met and started a family of their own. So, I guess I am also a beneficiary of MCC, which is an organization I am pleased to support in its continuing work around the world.



--- Greta Wiens

Book Corner ~ Debbie Fast

Legacy of Mercy by Lynn Austin

“Having returned to Chicago, young socialite Anna Nicholson can't seem to focus on her upcoming marriage. The new information she's learned about her birth mother continues to pull at her & she hires Pinkerton detectives to help her discover the whole truth.

But as she meets people who once knew her mother & hears stories about the past, Anna soon discovers that some secrets are better left hidden.

With pressure mounting to keep the past quiet, she discovers daily that her choice to seek God's purpose for her life isn't as simple as she had hoped. When things are at their darkest, Anna knows she can turn to her grandmother, Geesje de Jonge, back in Holland, Michigan. Geesje's been helping new Dutch immigrants – including a teen with a troubled history – adjust to America. She only hopes that her wisdom can help all these young people through the turmoil they face.”

Outbreak by Davis Bunn

“Something sinister is happening in the waters off the coast of West Africa, trailing death in its wake. Local insurgencies are no longer the only imminent danger – and the panic mounts. But before a global alarm can be sounded, the sea currents shift, & the outbreak evaporates. Coastal populations are relieved when life returns to normal, & the region's governments are all too happy to sweep the publicity nightmare under the rug.

Theo Bishop & Avery Madison saw the devastation with their own eyes, & they know the danger hasn't passed – it's just changed locations. But everywhere they turn, powerful interests are determined to silence all credible evidence of the impending biological disaster – by any means necessary. They will have to stay out of the crosshairs long enough to convince the powers that be of the toxic destruction about to be unleashed on American soil ...”

Strands of Truth by Colleen Coble

“Harper Taylor is used to being alone – after all, she grew up in one foster home after another. Oliver Jackson finally took her under his wing when she was a runaway teenager & now Harper pours her marine biology knowledge into Oliver's pen shell research. But she's never stopped wishing for a family of her own.

So when a DNA test reveals a half-sister living just 2 hours away, Harper is both hopeful & nervous. Over warm cinnamon rolls, Harper & Annabelle find striking similarities in their stories. Is it just coincident that both their mothers died tragically, without revealing Harper & Annabelle's father's name?

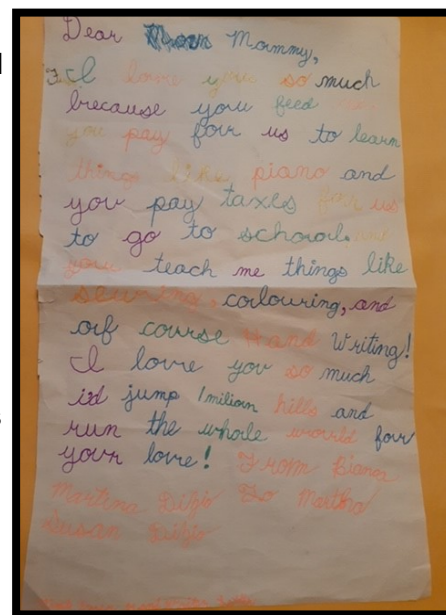
Oliver's son Ridge, still sees Harper as a troubled teen even all these years later. But when Oliver is attacked, Ridge & Harper find themselves working together to uncover dangerous secrets that threaten to destroy them all. They must unravel her past before they can have any hope for the future.”

A young artist in our midst

My name is Bianca Martina DiZio. I am 14 years old and attend Eden High School and am in grade 9. My parents are Martha and Dave DiZio. My grandparents are John and Tina Friesen. My grandparents have attended NUMC all the years they have lived in Canada. My mother was raised in NUMC and was baptized and married at NUMC.



As a young girl before I even started school I was fascinated with drawing and art in general. I could always be found happy with a crayon, pencil, pen or marker and some paper. Other kids were happy with games or electronic devices but I was always into making my ideas come to life on paper or canvas. In junior kindergarten I saw cursive handwriting for the first time and came home to declare that "it was prettier than printing" and that "I have to learn how to make my letters in cursive". My mother and both of my grandmothers thought this was something of a fad and that I would lose interest soon. They all made practice pages for me and before I was done kindergarten, I was able to write most things in cursive writing and was happy with the effort I had made to make "pretty writing" on paper. I have a letter that I wrote my mom in kindergarten as an example.



My love of all things art related had me painting on an easel I received for Easter one year as well as trying my hand at other forms of sketching with charcoal and pencils as well as different types of paints. I can be found doodling on most pieces of paper given to me at school after the work is completed. In grade 4 we were performing the 3 little pigs play in French class and I made the 3 houses out of large cardboard boxes and painted them at home for the class to use. The teacher loved the houses so much they were kept for her class for all the remaining years I was at public school.

A few of my assignments were used by teachers as examples for other years classes and this made me very proud of my talent for art. In grade 6 my T-shirt design was chosen for our schools Rankin cancer run shirt design. I was also asked to paint the banner for our school that year.

I have a photo that I drew of my grandparents' home from the outside. I wanted them to have a photo of their home to see how special it is to me. They have it framed and keep it in their kitchen.

Art has always been my favorite subject and I have found it comes naturally to me, so I find it cool that I can do my own thing and after I am done, I get a nice piece of art. In grade 8 I spent more than 6 months working on a digital drawing of my class and all the students and teachers in our grade. I made sure each student was able to identify themselves based on favorite clothing, sports or food. At the end of the year I printed one for each student and they were all so excited to find themselves in the photo. This was a major thing for me as I was nervous of their reaction to something I had spent half the school year working on. I was pleased with their appreciation of the drawing and their kind words. I was very proud to be the recipient of the art award in grade 8 and look forward to pursuing art and graphic design in high school and beyond.

I had three of my artwork pieces chosen to hang in the front hall at Eden and I look forward to creating more artwork for others to enjoy.

I am thankful for the creative ability that God has gifted me with and want to share my love of art with others.

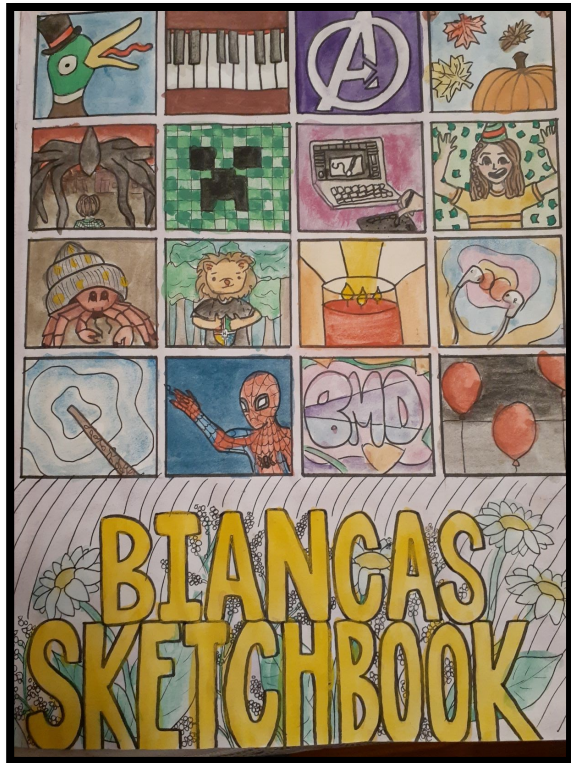
~ Bianca Dizio

Bianca's mom adds:

I have attached a few photos I found of Bianca and her art over the years. The photo of her standing to the right of the colourful photo on the wall I believe is the best for this article. This is a piece of art that she created for her art project at school that was to represent all the things she loves. This, along with the Strawberry Shortcake photo are both currently hanging at Eden.



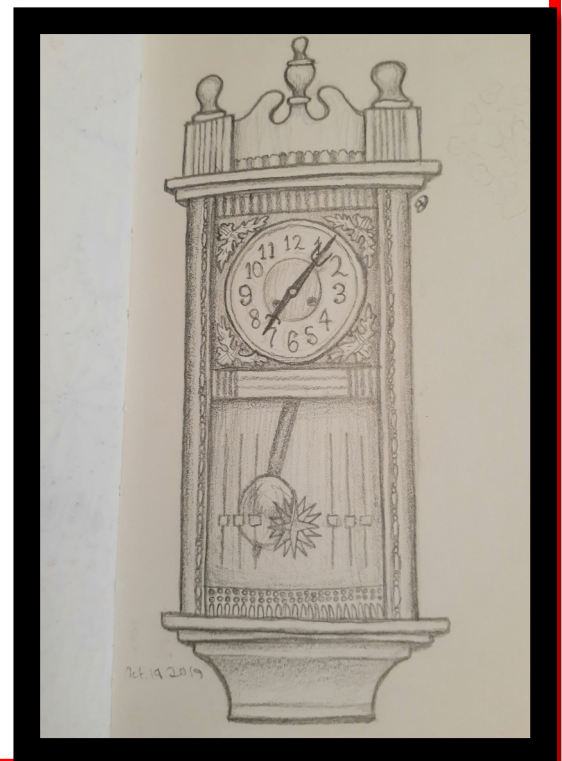
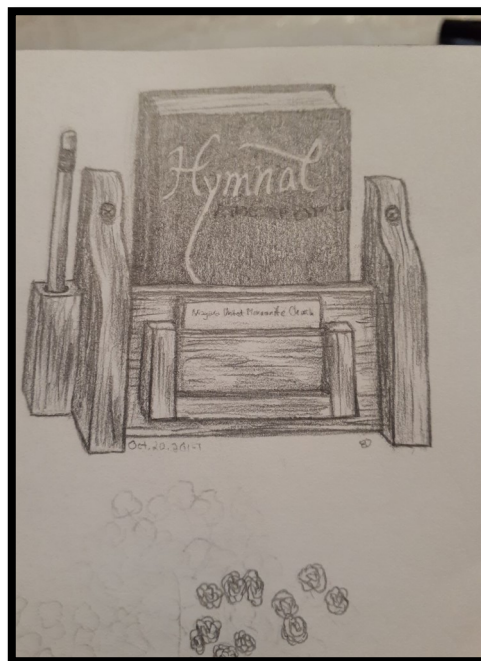
The photo where Bianca is standing beside the photo of Einstein with the “crazy hair” was her artwork hanging at the DSBN art showcase. Her piece was chosen from her grade 7 class to be shown at the showcase.



These are some photos out of Bianca's school sketchbook.

I particularly love the Hymnal drawing. This is something she does during service. She always needs to be sketching, doodling. Her mind does not seem to want to rest. The clock was done at her great Aunt's and Uncle's house and is of a very old clock they have in their kitchen. This was sketched during the conversation around the table between Thanksgiving dinner and dessert.

(~above comments contributed by Martha Dizio, Bianca's Mom)



Another branch of MCC—MDS Saipan, USA

A couple of years ago, my since childhood buddy, Ralf Hamm, who got us interested in Mennonite Disaster Service, MDS, many years ago, was invited by the US government, or the Federal Emergency Management Agency, FEMA, to travel to Saipan to help rebuild roofs, blown off by the 2015 typhoon know as Typhoon Soudelor. It scored a direct hit on the 5 mile, by 12 mile island of 50,000 people, located in the Pacific Ocean, about 4 hours flight east of Japan. MDS rebuilt about 90 houses, mostly roofs, as a result of that event. When I heard about Ralf's trip, I thought it would be interesting to go there as a volunteer myself, as in all my travels, I've never been in the far east.

This summer, when our TEAM SHOWER CAP (that is another story), group of friends who do an annual, 1 week bicycle ride, took a break one day, my buddy Arnold Goerzen, announced he'd like to do an MDS trip. Alright lets do it. (Arnold grew up in the house adjacent to our church, and married Marlene Braun).

It turned out, that another typhoon, had hit Saipan in the fall of 2018, and MDS was once again looking for volunteers. Super Typhoon Yutu, also passed right over the island then stalled there for many hours before it continued on its way. It caused horrific damage to the houses of the inhabitants. Over 5000 homes were damaged or destroyed. Interestingly enough, of the 90 houses rebuilt by MDS after Typhoon Soudelor, only 1 lost its roof during Typhoon Yutu. (MDS was doing something right).

Our bike trip was early September, and the grape harvest was late this year – so I had time to quickly squeeze in an MDS trip in late September and early October. We called MDS and after some amount of paper work, were scheduled to fly out September 20, and return Oct. 8. Since the cost to travel to Saipan, is so high and is paid for by FEMA, MDS and FEMA require a 2 week commitment from volunteers.

The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, CNMI forms a chain of 14 volcanic islands, rising up from bottom of the Mariana Trench, the deepest part of the oceans in the world. The main island is Saipan. It is 3600miles or 8 hours west of Hawaii, and about the same latitude as Mexico City.

The islands have been settled for many thousands of years, by the Chamorro people, and their language is still widely used today, although English is the official language. The Spanish controlled the island from 1521 to about 1900, followed by Germany, to 1914, and Japan to 1944. During WWII, the US wrestled it away from Japan, as it was the 1st air strip they held that was in striking distance of Japan itself with their B29 bombers. It was from its sister island Tinian, that the Enola Gay carried the 1st nuclear weapon to be used in war, to Hiroshima.

The CNMI today, is still part of the USA (which is why FEMA and MDS operate there) and its citizens are Americans, with no federal voting rights, nor are they taxed federally. The main industry is tourism (Japanese, Chinese and Korean), which is currently, due to the typhoons and all the destruction and now rebuilding, down about 50%. The climate is hot and humid. Average summer temps are 31C and winter 30C. The humidity at 80% year round, makes for a humidex of 40C. Since everything is imported, and due to its small size, the cost of living is higher than ours here in Niagara. Land ownership is restricted to individuals who are at least 1/4 Chamorro descent and is often passed down through maternal lines. There is a 14 hour time difference, making 5:00pm in Niagara, 7:00am, the next day, Saipan.

The people Arnold and I were to help had basically survived the 2015 typhoon, more or less intact, but had been really beaten up, as you will see, by Typhoon Yutu in 2018.

We left Niagara early on the morning of Friday September 20, flying out of Pearson around 6:00am. Then over to Denver, next Honolulu, finally landing in Guam, after dusk, on Saturday, about 24 hours of airplanes, and airports. There we stayed overnight, and caught an early, 40 min flight to Saipan, being mildly jet lagged. We were met at the airport, by our rookie to Saipan MDS project director or PD, Don Horst from Kansas, and a previous MDS project director from Seattle, Harold Miller (Harold, who had spent months in Saipan as the MDS project director for the 2015 typhoon, was there for a week, getting Don oriented with all the local details).

Every MDS site has more than a few things that are common to all

sites, and more than a few things that are unique to the site. Arnold and I were prepared to be put up in MDS bunk house style accommodations, and were pleasantly surprised to be in an ocean front apartment building, each with our own bedroom, complete with kitchen. The apartments facing the ocean, were still, a year after the typhoon, being renovated, but our rooms, looking to the sides and back, were nothing short of excellent. Not 1st class rooms, like you might find in Florida, but clean and most important, air conditioned, with daily room service (I've never had this with MDS before, and don't expect it again any time soon). This was of course all provided by FEMA.

The whole MDS crew was spread out among apartments in this building. We made our own breakfasts in our room. Then met for making lunches, a devotional, and tail gate meeting, prior to going to the construction site.



View of the beach from the top of our apartment building. We snuck up onto the roof as the building renovations crew had left some doors

Due to the heat, we started work at 7:00 and finished up around 3:00 or if we were really keen, or wanted to get something done, maybe 4:00 or 4:30. Then back to the apartment for a shower, or swim in the ocean, or maybe a short nap, then dinner at a local restaurant. In some ways, this was not the best, as there were no common areas, where we could, as in most MDS sites, share our evening meal and socialize, play cards, or just tell stories. As it turned out, again due to the unaccustomed heat, I spend a lot of time sleeping, averaging 9-10 hours per night (night 2 of the trip, still jet lagged, I slept 12 hours), as opposed to my back home 6-7 hours per night.

Our first site or clients were Anna and Nan, who owned a nice home near the ocean on the east side of the island. FEMA has case workers, who verify the needs, and the financial resources of the people seeking aid. The current welfare rate in Saipan is around 40%, so most of the 5000 homes, damaged or destroyed by Yutu, would qualify for aid. Folks who could afford to rebuild, had either done so, or were waiting on trades men, who were all busy fixing up tourist based buildings, and were not available for lower paying home renovations. Anna had slowly built her house over the course of the past 20 years, saving money and slowly adding various features. The typhoon had destroyed most of the doors, and windows, and 80% of the roofs. She was out of work for several years due to the typhoon damaged economy, and just got her 1st job again while we were there. Her husband Nan, was suffering from throat cancer and could not talk, but was there every day helping where he could and provided us with a stew of, in his hand writing, "rice with crap meat and sausage, soup peas and carrots". I think he meant crab meat. They were living with friends and were eager to get their house back.

A view of their house prior to starting work. In the fore ground is Juan and our 2 site directors, Don and Harold in the back-ground. The house is in poor shape. Only walls standing. Since he's in the picture, I should talk about Juan.



He was born in Colombia. During the cocaine war period of the 80's, his parents moved to the safety of Canada, and Juan went to school in Toronto, where he took up soccer. He ended up playing professional soccer in England as a mid fielder, for a tier 2 team, which could not get out of the basement of the league. After 2 years he gave it up and returned to Canada, where he heard about MDS, googled it, and signed up for Saipan.

We got to work clearing the last of the debris from the house, while FEMA delivered a load of lumber and metal. By lunch, Don the PD, asked if I would be crew leader for the house, and Harold got busy teaching me how to build the roof so that it would not blow off again. Neither FEMA, nor local building codes, gave us any guidance in how to build a typhoon proof roof, and Harold (as I mentioned he was PD for Saipan for many months after the 2015 typhoon) and previous MDS folks had developed certain procedures to get it right. I ended up spending several hours over the next few evenings, doing up drawings of what was needed, so that I would remember the tricks, once Harold left, as I only had about 3 days to learn from him. Don our current PD was not yet familiar with any of this and needed to spend time figuring out where things were on the island, and left the details of building to me.

This is a good time to digress and talk about Harold. Most of you will think (I don't think so) that I'm short. Well Harold was a good 3" shorter than me. He was 79, retired since age 60, and still does house renovations back home, to make play money to support his trophy hunting hobby. He has hunted big game all over the world. He grew up in the Seattle area, in a Christian home. At an early age he decided he wanted to become a millionaire, and has always maintained a 5 year financial plan. He married had kids and became a grocer, for a large grocery chain in the American West, Kroeger, if memory serves me right. He was very successful and was promoted through corporate ranks, at one time managing several stores in the Seattle area. According to Harold, margins are very thin in the grocery business, 1-2%. Everything is about volume, and managing costs. The stores are open 24 x 7 and everyone in management was expected to work 60 hours a week. With his goal of becoming a millionaire, he bought houses and apartment buildings as he could afford them, and spent his Sundays

doing renovations and repairs and collecting rent. He never attended church, or even one of his children's school concerts, or little league baseball games (he freely admitted his wife is a saint). I let all this digest for a day or 2 and one day got up my nerve and asked him what changed, how did he end up with MDS, in Saipan.

I guess near the end of his career he was asked to open up the 1st store the company would have in Alaska. He was given 2 days to make up his mind. He discussed this with his wife, who agreed, subject to one condition. In Alaska, he would take Sundays off, and would attend church with her. He, took the job, kept his part of the deal, and attended church. The store was a huge success, making 6% profit, the highest in the company. He ended up associating with church people as opposed to work people. This changed his life, and his values.

By age 60 he decided to retire (giving his boss 2 days notice), and told God he would donate 10% of his time, and 10% of his wealth to missions. He thinks he's around 20% for both. One of his church buddies seeing he was retired, invited him to join him on an MDS trip. Harold has now completed over 35 MDS trips. He was a fun guy to work with, and I hope to meet him again some time before he retires from MDS as well.

Back to Nan's house. Once we had the FEMA truck unloaded, we went up on the roof and started removing old rafters. Arnold, who at 65 is in great shape, as he spends a lot of his retirement time on a bicycle, was up there in the blazing sun and high humidity, enjoying the view and the work. After about 2 hours, he was red in the face, looking dizzy, and down off the roof in the shade. HEAT STRESS, the precursor to heat stroke. Everyone got it at some point. He never returned to the roof that day (the dizziness up on a roof factor scared him and me). We left him in the shade to cool off, with lots of water, and then gave him a ground/shade job for the rest of the day, working with the windows and doors. In fact Harold noticed his attention to detail at this job, and Arnold spend most of his 2 weeks working at it, unless we really needed an extra hand on the roof. Arnold has a one day a week or less job at a tool repair shop in St. Catharines, and was our "go to guy" for nailer or any other power tool repair.

Some days had a lot of cloud cover and were manageable. But on sunny days, up on the roof it was brutal. I worked with a hotel towel around my neck and would wipe my face and head all day long. By lunch I could ring it out. One day, between 7:00 and 4:00 I drank 4L of water.

Our boys who spend all their time on the roof were Harlan and Ben, both in their late 20s, thin, and energetic, both from Pennsylvania, and both good with construction jobs. Harlan worked for a farmer and had dropped a snowplow on the toes of his right foot, most of which were now missing. You would not know it. He was nimble as a goat up in the roof rafters, and the only one who could climb the coconut tree to get us some nice coconut milk.

*(MDS "adventure" to be continued in next LWU Newsletter)
Thanks for an exciting opening chapter, Erv Willms*



MY GOAL

Calmness, gentleness, and peace ~
That is my goal.
From anxious thoughts to find
Release,
Allow God's tenderness
Fold 'round my soul,
Make restlessness and worry
Cease,
Calmness, gentleness, and peace.....

~ Mary L. Pries



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Readers, you have reached the last page of *Life With Us*, and we hope you have enjoyed reading the articles, and viewing many pictures. **We thank all the contributors** to this & past Newsletters for sharing your personal experiences with us, your church community. Some of the articles will be continued in our next newsletter, so look forward to these. However, these few exciting "to be continued" articles are certainly not enough to fill another newsletter, so we need many more personal stories. Since the year 2020 is MCC's 100th anniversary, we plan to celebrate it throughout the year. Your assignment in this project is to either write about personal experiences with MCC, or to collect experiences from parents, grandparents, or friends. Then add a picture and send it to us. We prefer to receive these articles by email in a format that can be edited, but if you don't have access to internet and email, handwritten articles will be accepted. Please start your assignment soon; March with its Spring weather will be here before you know it.

Wishing all of you a blessed and healthy year 2020!

~ Editors, Kathy & Lani

LIFE WITH US
NEWSLETTER

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