



May, June 2020

Life With Us

At Niagara United Mennonite Church

You Are Mine

I will come to you in the silence
I will lift you from all your fear
You will hear My voice, I claim you as My choice
Be still, and know I am near

I am hope for all who are hopeless
I am eyes for all who long to see
In the shadows of the night, I will be your light
Come and rest in Me

I am strength for all the despairing
Healing for the ones who dwell in shame
All the blind will see, the lame will all run free
And all will know My name

I am the Word that leads all to freedom
I am the peace the world cannot give
I will call your name, embracing all your pain
Stand up, now walk, and live!

Do not be afraid, I am with you
I have called you each by name
Come and follow Me
I will bring you home
I love you and you are mine.

David Haas
Sing the Story p. 49
<https://youtube/gBPA4mIJ5NY>

Sunrise over Niagara orchards—photo by Sharla Rae Stephens-Wiens

Paska and a Pandemic

By: Ellery Rauwerda

When I was asked to write about how this season is affecting life at the Rauwerda household, I thought that Easter may be the perfect glimpse into how our lives have been impacted.

A typical Easter weekend in my family would include a church service on Good Friday and Easter Sunday, at least one Easter egg hunt, two turkeys and a ham (or maybe a third turkey), some nostalgic Easter decor, and three days packed full of family. Oh and of course, paska. This year looked rather different for us, as I'm sure it was for everyone.

Rather than getting ready for a Good Friday church service, Friday morning started out with worship from the living room couch. We tuned into a service from The Meeting House that morning so that we could participate in their live streamed communion service. We poured a little bit of wine and Mark got out some bread, and we joined thousands of others taking communion in that same moment. We also sang together and prayed together, finding a whole lot of comfort in the unity of it all. We read Elliott the Easter story using her special *Jesus Calling* Bible. I found myself understanding the story of Jesus' death in a whole new way as I read this children's version of the story. I've found the focus of Christ's suffering to be the physical elements - the weight of the cross, the thorns on His head, the sword in His side. This story focused on the pain of that moment of separation from God. As Jesus took on the sin of the entire world, the Father turned His face away. Having my own baby now, and imagining her crying out to me and me turning my own face away from her made this image of Jesus and His Father heartbreaking to me. My appreciation for the sacrifice Jesus made - and God made - was heightened this year because of this.

Easter Sunday was spent on the couch again, this time tuning into our own Red Brick Church. I insisted on concluding the service listening to a recording of *Alleluia He is Coming*, my favourite Easter song. We didn't have a recording of our own Niagara UM version, but our substitute - an African choir that danced to the music - brought a different sense of community and joy to us this year.

We would typically have followed both Good Friday and Easter Sunday services with huge meals at extra long tables surrounded by our family. This year, we ate around our own kitchen table surrounded by our immediate little family. But this slower paced Easter left room for some new opportunities. We took time on Saturday to take Easter photos with Elliott. We had bought her an Easter dress earlier in March, and wanted her to be able to wear it. We shared the photos with family and it brought joy on both sides. Family said it brought smiles to their faces, and their responses brought smiles to ours.

My parents surprised us with Elliott's very first Easter basket, filled with an adorable stuffed chick for Elliott and some chocolate that we decided she'd need our help to eat.

Both of my grandmas still made paska and dropped it right off



to our doorstep, leaving us with more delicious paska than we could ever eat alone, and so we found a way to share it. On Saturday, some dear friends came over and backed their truck into our driveway. We sat in the trunk of our RAV4 and we put the paska out on the driveway between us, sharing one of our Mennonite Easter traditions as they told us about their Polish ones. During that time, another good friend came by with a small potted flower. She was doing the rounds this Easter, delivering little plants and notes saying ***He is Risen! Happy Easter.***

That small hand written note summed up this season for us. No, we could not gather as we typically do. We couldn't share the words *Christ has risen, He has risen indeed!* aloud within the walls of our sanctuary. We couldn't enjoy a turkey (or three) in the company of our family. We couldn't do an Easter Egg Hunt or comment on the nostalgic Easter decor. But it still happened. Easter still came, Christ's sacrifice still happened, and because of it, we still continue to put our trust and hope in the One who died for us. Maybe, in this season of unknowns, we even feel our need for Jesus a little more strongly, and maybe this Easter season was especially meaningful specifically because all of the traditions were stripped away.

Christ HAS risen. He has risen indeed!



Some bright spots in the midst of a pandemic

~ by Lani Gade

As bad and ugly as the Corona Virus is, I experienced a few pleasant surprises in the midst of it all.

One very special surprise was when the doorbell rang and I found a beautiful little flowerpot on my front door. I love flowers in the house and that it came from one of my younger friends made it very special.



Then I got a very special handmade card delivered from an other friend. No, it wasn't my birthday or any other special day. She sent it just because. And that made me appreciated so much more.

The other time I surprised myself. We had been to friends house before the self isolation when she treated us to some slices of fresh baked bread. They tasted really yummy. And when she told me how easy the recipe was, I got vaguely interested. All I needed was regular flower and Graham flour. Now I have to tell you, I never baked bread in my whole life and that is almost a shame for a

Mennonite lady of my age. I had no idea what Graham flower was and couldn't find it either. By then the great self isolation was in place and I thought that was the end of my bread baking career. But when I talked to my friend about it and she told me that I could use any other flour with it, then something donned on me. Way down at the bottom of my freezer was a bag of sorghum flour (or Kafir as we called it in Paraguay) that I had brought back from our last visit there in 2013. We loved Kafir bread. So I went to it and you won't believe it, at the end I had two nice and healthy looking loafs of bread. I'm ready to do it again.



The last big surprise came from my granddaughter. One evening we talked on the phone and I told her that we had had Pea-soup for supper. It's hard to believe, but my grand-kids love pea-soup. "Oh, Oma" she says

"I have a craving for pea-soup, can you send me the recipe?" Well, I didn't have a recipe but I wrote down the ingredients in no particular order. I even forgot one. But low and behold, a couple of days later she sends me an email with the picture of the pea-soup she cooked. My daughter, who got to taste it, said it had tasted just as good as mine.

Well done Elisabeth!



Hidden Insights – By: Austin Penner

At a time where we are asked to stay home, some of us self-isolating because we have been away, so much beauty unfolds. Finally, finally, we are given the gift of time. Time to slow down to see what matters most. Time to catch our breath and unravel rare gifts that we surely would not have the time or energy to do otherwise. I am absolutely loving this time. As I was going through an old notebook, I came across a poem of sorts that I wrote about a year ago. It made my heart sing to read, as I felt reacquainted with who I was last year, and equally connected to who I am now. I felt the rawness of the sporadic loneliness I felt last year that I am not currently experiencing. I thought I'd share it with you because why not? I have the time. I titled this piece "Who am I?"

Who Am I?-

~ An excerpt from Austin's March 2019 journaling

I am a girl who wants rest for her mind
Who desires peace and contentment above all
Who has the power by God to rest her lovely mind
To let it sink deep into the fibres of soft wool

And while her mind is resting
She is the most productive of all
As she doesn't spend energy on things unloving
And she follows where her heart is called

She feels the most herself alone
But loneliness is her biggest fear
The two swirl violently together
Until she remembers she has the power within her
...to calm the inner storm

She wants to be excited for the rest of her life
For all that is to come
But truthfully this excitement doesn't come naturally
Yet she will be disciplined, she will be strong

She knows what she wants more than she credits herself
She needs direction, she can't do this alone
She'll call on Jesus, her long lost friend
And he will soothe her aching soul

We can all take a moment to honour who we have been,
who we are, and who we are becoming...especially in this
unique season. Such a gift.

Quarantine Challenges ~ Will Friesen

My life in quarantine has taken some getting used to, especially since I had to learn how to teach first- and second-year university chemistry courses online with only spring break to figure out how to do it! Much grace has been extended this semester mutually between students and professors, especially when I bumble around attempting to perform a chemistry lab on video. There have been some aspects of this transition that have gone surprisingly well, but the time when we can return to something resembling normalcy at Hesston College is very much anticipated by all.

Isolating at home has had its moments of boredom, of contentedness, and even of relief. As a fairly introverted individual, it has been nice to stay home and not feel guilty about not wanting to interact with others. At the same time, there are people I enjoy visiting with! Overall, I have felt content as there has been ample time to work in the garden, go on walks, and finish some home projects. We've learned to cut one another's hair, and, despite some very tense nerves, the trims didn't turn out half bad! (No need to worry, cosmetologists -- there will be no post-pandemic competition from me!)

I have missed my church community, and I can't say that I love recording music at home to share on online services. However, the community where I now live, North Newton, is much like Virgil in that many of the people with whom I go to church live nearby and can often be spotted while out on walks. We've found that we can still be community despite the necessity to stay six feet apart.



Mirror shot.

Our Newest Syrian Canadian

We were a loving, happy family – three sisters and three brothers and my dad and mom – until the war knocked on our door and tore up my beautiful family and most other Syrian families. My family was killed on November 23rd, 2013 by militia supported by the government. Only my brother and I survived from that massacre because we weren't there. Every male aged 17-19 is forced to serve in the military for two years under normal circumstances but in war times since nobody knows when you can go back home, my brother and I decided to run away to Lebanon with the clothes we had on because we didn't want to kill anyone or be killed. We stayed in a refugee camp – there were 23 people in a very small tent, 6m x 6m to be exact. We had to suffer from racism that we faced every day. We weren't allowed to work and didn't have any permanent resident documents because we crossed the border illegally from the mountains. I worked for lot of Lebanese business owners as a construction worker and too many times at the end of the project they would say, "We don't owe you any money."

Then imagine one day a local TV station decided to do an interview with my brother and me to shine a spotlight on the Syrian refugee situation. During the interview my brother got stabbed in the head by a guy who didn't like my brother because he is Syrian. It was that simple – they were shooting a video on the public beach – and my brother ended up needing seven stitches. Days passed and my aunt had a chance to submit our file for a resettlement program that is supported by many countries, including Canada. After finishing the processing and interviews my brother and I arrived at Toronto International Airport on January 29th, 2016 with hope for a brighter future for both of us. We spent our first night in a hotel and the next morning Kathe Wiens came to the hotel with an Arabian translator (shout out to her).

Oma (Kathe Wiens) as I love to call her and her church, hand in hand with the MCC, helped us to stand on our feet: by getting registered in English school, helping us to get health cards, and even helping with driving school. We spent the first two months in Kathe's house. With caring and love every school day someone from the community drove us from Niagara-on-the-Lake to St Catharines. Esther and Greta Wiens also helped us to rent a house and to understand how to file taxes. A lot of people invited us for a dinner or supper. They did everything to get us to fit in to this amazing community. There are no words to describe how I appreciate what they did for us. Now I'm married and I have a baby boy who is five months old. Now we are very proud to be Syrian-Canadian.

Best wishes, Mohamad Saby



Some thoughts on the pandemic and its effects on our lives

*Philippians 4:11-13 has taken on a deeper meaning for me -- being content in need and plenty.

*how much I love the simple life, similar to the Amish -- own gardens, no Hydro, etc.; we have cut each other's hair for years now!

*phone calls to family and friends have been priceless; Zoom with the kids and grandkids has been fun; but the not seeing them for awhile feels almost like either they have moved away, or we have :(

*reading and crocheting are relaxing activities I enjoy.

*remembering that God is Jehovah-Jireh -- He will provide.

*I have been reading every morning "Our Daily Bread" (thank you to whoever supplies those devotionals to our Church) and the book, **Jesus Calling**.

- lastly, and certainly not least, we have Karl's Mom living with us here on Line 8, since April 21st. She is too unwell to go back to her Heidehof apartment, and we (the whole family) are trying to discern, with God's help, what living situation would be in her best interests.

These are my thoughts during this unusual time. *Laurene Nickel*

For animal lovers and a bit of local history:

~ Submitted by: Sigrid Wiens

Due to COVID-19 we all have limited access to our families and friends. For myself I have found it particularly difficult not being able to hold and physically interact with our grandchildren. However, our granddaughters Ella and Naomi with the help of their mother Rita Wiens, have come up with a wonderful and creative way to keep in touch with friends and family through a weekly newspaper up-date called "**Heartland City News**". Every Monday I look forward to a new edition delivered to our front porch, with stories of their daily lives, puzzles, word searches and words of encouragement from scripture to help fill my time. (Rita is a teacher and home schools the girls.)

With their permission I would like to share excerpts from their April 20, 2020 edition. I will also include a post-note from a friend who also receives the weekly updates.

For some background information - Nanny referred to in the article is me (Sigrid Wiens), Ma is Ella and Naomi's other grandma. Sugar Ray and Ollie are our two adopted cats. Recently we celebrated their first birthday, and since the grandchildren couldn't be there we sent them pictures of our celebration as seen in the pictures attached. If looks could kill....Sugar Ray was not happy with me that day. Now from the "**Heartland City News**".

...FROM THE MAYOR

One morning Ella, Naomi, Mommy and Ma were out for a walk on the kitty trail. Ella and Naomi call it that because Nanny has 2 cats and her backyard is against the trail. One cat is black named Ollie and the other cat is part Siamese named Sugar Ray. Nanny is Ella and Naomi's grandma who lives in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Anyway, when Naomi put down her mittens to pick up one of the cats, Sugar Ray ran over to her mittens and took one of them and brought it under Nanny and Grandpa's deck. It was right in the middle of the deck underneath.....what was she going to do????

Ma got a medium sized stick. When Naomi started to carry it over, it snapped in half. Then Ma found a longer stick, and Naomi carried it over to the deck. Then she put it under the deck and hooked the mitten on the stick and pulled the mitten from underneath the deck. Sugar Ray thought Naomi was playing with him so he kept pouncing on the end of the stick.

FUN FACT ABOUT THE TRAIL

The kitty trail is actually part of the Upper Canada Heritage Trail. From late 1800's to mid 1900's it was used as a railroad to travel and ship items to and from ports in Niagara-on-the-Lake. This railway was owned separately by Michigan Central Railway, New York Central Railway, and the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake. Eventually, the railway was abandoned and it was turned into a trail in 1984.

Over 30 years later Naomi and Ella turned a very small part of the trail into the Kitty Trail.

The length of the trail is 10.6 kilometres and it is used for hiking, walking, cycling off road, horseback riding and dog walking and kitty cat exploring (Sugar and Ollie exploring).

POST-NOTE...from Joy Janzen.

Lots of interesting stories in the neighbourhood. If your reporters are looking for story leads, the life of Sugar and Ollie are very interesting. Every dog that walks down the Heritage Trail knows Sugar very well. Sugar likes to tease all the dogs. He knows the dogs on the leash can't reach him so he comes really close. Sugar and Ollie can often be seen perched on the last stone post of the Randwood Estate. They lead exciting lives.

FROM BIBLEVILLE...."Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you."

Thus far from the Heartland City News. Thank you for allowing me to share how we have experienced some fun and joyful moments and how we stay connected with our grandchildren and feline at this unique and unusual time of our lives. May you all stay well.



Meet Ollie and Sugar Ray!



Masks & Paska

It's the thought that counts, right?

Palm Sunday, 2020 arrived about two weeks into the Covid 19 pandemic isolation time. Things felt a bit weird, but not too confining yet. Our plans to fly to Winnipeg and then on to Wichita to celebrate Easter with our children, and then with Will and John had to be canceled. What a disappointment! But life must go on, and we would make the best of the time spent in the safety of our home. So Paskas would still have to be baked, and if they were to be shared with our kids on Winnipeg, they would have to be sent off tomorrow, Monday, April 6. So Palm Sunday was spent baking the annual Paskas. Thankfully, they turned out well, and could be decorated and packed up for their trip out west.

Bright and early (9:00 a.m.) the package was delivered to the Post Office in Niagara. I had already prepared all the necessary paper work online with tracking number and stuck it onto the package. So all I had to do was drop it off at the PO. It would arrive in Winnipeg on Wednesday at the latest! Daily I would check the tracking number from Stoney Creek to 'in transit' and then nothing. Wednesday came and went, but no arrival in Winnipeg. OK well Thursday was the latest day it would arrive. So I called Chris and excitedly asked "Have the Paskas arrived?" "No Mom, not yet." Oh no, but Friday was a holiday, and then came Saturday and Easter Sunday, and Easter Monday.....Say good-bye to the Paskas this year. Easter Monday morning around 10:00 a.m. Chris called with the news "They're here"! Somewhat deflated, I asked how do they look? He hadn't opened the box yet, but would call me back when they unpacked everything.



- Questionable colour!

The pictures tell the story of how well the Paska traveled. Is that green stuff on the Paska just greenish icing or is it mould? Smell it! Can't tell!

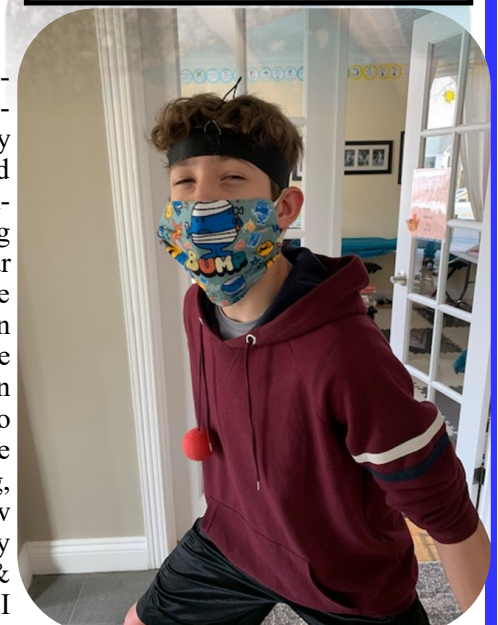
We can't really smell anything, but we'll cut off the icing and see what's underneath. Is a Paska still a Paska without its coat of icing? Does it taste like Paska? Kind of? Ok throw out the Paska and let the birds enjoy it. We don't need anyone getting sick from questionable week-old Paska that has bounced along in a big truck for a week! I will bake you fresh Paska when you come to see us in Niagara next, even if it's Christmas!



Is undressed Paska still Paska?

So the Paska had not traveled well, but surely the face masks would fair better. Everyone in Niagara was sewing face masks, from the seamstresses at the Shaw to neighbours and quilters from local churches. Well, I can sew things if they're not too fancy and so I looked up mask patterns online, made myself a paper pattern, and then looked for remnants in my basement. Several years ago, I had sewn pyjamas for our grandkids, and of course had pieces of material left over. I was not planning on supplying masks for all of Niagara or a local hospital—not that ambitious—just enough for our children and grandchildren and ourselves. It was kind of fun, except for getting the elastic to fit in nicely and come out straight. Oh well, they're not to be sold. John

thought the colours of the material were somewhat questionable, especially if men or boys were supposed to wear them—too bad. It is what it is! Once the masks were finished, four of them headed to Winnipeg, regular post, because it didn't matter how long they traveled—nothing to go mouldy here. A week later they arrived, safe & sound. Were they ever worn in Winnipeg? I didn't ask and wasn't told, and I don't really care. It's the thought that counts—right?



Brave Nicolas modeling one of Oma's masks—made from remnants of his **MR BUMP** pjs.

~ Kathy Rempel

From Uruguay, With Gratitude: A Global Pandemic Journey ~ by Renate Dau Klaassen

Last March, Randy & I, together with my parents Hans Hermann & Ingrid Dau, had opportunity to travel to Uruguay to visit our relatives there. My main objective for going was to gather more memories about my paternal grandparents, in hopes of documenting their life story. We arrived in the capital, Montevideo, on the 11th, with as yet no known cases of COVID-19 in the country, and on the 14th gathered at my father's sister Gudrun's house, where we were able to audio record a whole afternoon of reminiscing. It was at that gathering that one of my cousins, a school teacher, came in & said that all the schools were being shut down because the virus had made its way in from Italy. By March 20th, we received news that our return flight with the Panamanian airline for March 30th had been cancelled — Panama had shut down its airport. The earliest we could rebook for was April 23rd. We registered with the Canadian embassy, and proceeded to my mother's sister Ursula & her family out on the Delta Colony, to wait out the intervening 3+ weeks in the relative safety of that rural area.

My cousin Alfred & his wife Erika took Randy & me in on their dairy farm a couple of kms away from the colony centre. This was actually an idyllic location to wait out a global pandemic — the weather was still mild & pleasant, enabling us to sit outside where we enjoyed the beautiful views of rolling pastureland, in contrast to the confines of the city. Everything was

starting to green up again after a hot dry summer. We tried to make ourselves useful, weeding the vegetable garden, cutting grass, and tending to some of the kitchen duties while Erika was kept busy looking after a baby-boom of calves, and Alfred was seeding winter crops. In the mornings, we'd wake up to the sound of cows mooing, and all sorts of birds chattering. There were many

beautiful flowers blooming around the house, including two enormous hibiscus bushes in pink and red, that attracted butterflies and hummingbirds. In the evenings, we'd go for walks along the dirt road, once observing 2 foxes making their way

across a field. All in all, a lovely country get-away.

On Sundays we listened to audio recordings of messages from Alfred's brother's congregation in Switzerland, a church we had attended when we visited there two years prior.

My mother really cherished the extra-long quality time with her only sister in the village, and on Easter Sunday they all came over for a delicious Asado" (Uruguayan- style barbecue).



But the stress of the uncertainty over when we would be able to get home, and what was happening in the world as the virus spread, ate away at our enjoyment and peace. The embassy had informed us about a repatriation flight, that could take us to Sao Paulo, Brazil, but we would need to book our own flights from there, via the US. When we were notified that our airline was again postponing flights to May 5th, we grew desperate enough to pursue this option. It took an entire day of phoning, e-mailing, sending texts, and relaying snapshots of documents to get everything lined up. Our hosts helped with translating and printing out the tickets. A travel agent back home found us 2 additional flights from Sao Paulo to Houston with United, and from there to Toronto with Air Canada.

On the morning of the 18th, we piled into Alfred's small pick-up, our suitcases securely strapped down in the back, and my Tante Ulla supplied us with a bag lunch of empanadas to eat on the way. Before heading to the airport, we stopped on the street at Tante Gudrun's, and a bunch of our relatives joined us there to say goodbye from a safe physical distance. How do you bid farewell to loved ones you may possibly never see again in this life, without giving them a loving hug? That was hard!





The airport was all but deserted. By the time we boarded our plane, we were just a handful of foreigners, anxious to get home. The flight crew, dressed in face shields, masks and protective gowns, met us with squirts of hand sanitizer and blue gloves to put on. We were seated well-spaced to avoid contagion. Landing in Sao Paulo felt even stranger; it was dark, and the huge complex was completely quiet and empty — no other planes at the terminal, no service vehicles on the tarmac, no people in the building. We were ushered to our next departure gate by an airline representative, and after a couple of hours, boarded the 10-hr flight to Houston. Things were a little livelier there, but still nothing like the traffic one expects at a big international airport. The advantage of that was that everything was immaculately clean, and keeping a distance from others was easy. Thunderstorms delayed our departure from there a bit, and made for a bouncy ride taking off, but finally we reached Toronto. I felt like singing!

My brother and sister-in-law from Whitby were visiting her parents in Niagara earlier that day, and shuttled our car to the terminal, so that we could get home without coming into close contact with anyone else. Our children had placed a cute “Welcome Home!” sign and a vase of flowers at the door, and stocked our fridge with food for our 2-week quarantine time. I unpacked and settled into the bliss of home, feeling overwhelmed with gratitude and amazement at all the resources that had come together to get us home, not the least of which were the countless thoughts & prayers that accompanied us!

In Acts 2, we read how the early church lived together,

er, holding “all things in common” (vs. 44). Even though we are kept apart in this situation, I feel a strong sense that the well-being of each one of us depends on the well-being of everyone. My COVID-19 travel experience has challenged me to consider ways of living more generously, and being more prepared to offer what I can when I see someone in need. I may not be able to pay back the many people who helped us along the way, but I can look for ways to pay it forward. Who do I see around me who is in need of a community? Who feels trapped & far from home in a scary, uncertain world?

There is no such thing as being “independently wealthy”, and COVID-19 is showing us that more clearly than anything else has in a long time. I am among the 1% of the wealthiest people in the world, and I can easily travel to a faraway continent, without feeling any hardship over the expense. But when I need to get home, I am completely dependent on the resources & skills of others to help me get there. In our highly individualistic society, where so much of human life has been reduced to a survivalist competition between winners & losers, between the “haves” and the “have nots”, the Jesus Way calls us to return to God’s vision of community, where we recognize that we are all in this together; that all we are & have comes from God, and is meant to be shared in a spirit of compassion & generosity.

I pray that above all the reports of illness & death, above all the opinions of individual rights & national interests, we may hear God calling us today to a global community, where we understand that our wellbeing, and the wellbeing of others is one and the same.

MDS COVID-19

~ by *Erv Willms*

Well after a great one-week MDS stint in Renfrew Ontario in January of 2020, Esther and I were looking forward to our first long term, 5-week assignment. It was scheduled for Feb. 29 to April 5th, getting us home just in time for the Holy Week, and Easter.

We worked hard all of February, getting a bunch of house projects done, and farm equipment repaired, as well as making long TO DO lists for our kids who look after our pets, plants, livestock, farm, and emergencies, whenever we are gone.

MDS Winnipeg, who does all the scheduling of Canadian short term and long term volunteers for all the international projects, had asked us to go to Greenbrier County, West Virginia, I think because they knew our good MDS friends Gordon and Maria Martens were there (for 2 months) during the time we would be there. As well it turned out that at least for part of our trip, Mike and Linda Stuckey would be our site directors. They had been our directors back in 2017, when Esther and I had spent a week at Greenbrier with them (see the church paper from back then as I wrote about that trip as well – that was the one where US customs wanted to make Esther a US citizen).

Travel and Sunday introductions.

The border crossing at Ft. Erie on March 1 was easy/peasy. Using the tried and true formula of volunteering nothing and answering honestly only questions asked, we were through in 60 seconds. We were armed with letters of introduction as MDS volunteers and were prepared to go through 2 hours of border security, and FBI checks, but lucked upon a happy 1st level officer who sent us on our way. With 2 hours taken off our estimated travel time, the trip was totally low stress.

So it was with great joy that we arrived in Lewisburg West Virginia, at the MDS offices, to be reunited with Gord and Maria. This was the 1st time we worked together since 2017. We had tried in-between, but life got in the way. We were staying at a large gymnasium and conference centre. It's use to MDS was donated by a local church. It included a small cottage which we shared with Gord and Maria. Leadership must have thought it would be good if the early risers, the cooks, ie Mari, head cook and Esther, head cook in training, did not wake up the rest of the team, so we had our own digs.

I had recalled that as a weekly volunteer in 2017, Mike our site director back then had strongly encouraged us to not only get lots of work done as is our Mennonite way, but to whenever possible drop our tools and chat with our clients, and learn their stories. If you remember our previous Greenbrier story, you will recall that we had a good time listening to Bill whose house we rebuilt and his son-in-law Brian who was a good storyteller. Now as long termers, in a leadership roll, Mike's message to us was slightly changed. As we met, just a couple of hours before the weekly volunteers arrived, we were reminded that yes, the clients of course were important, and a big concern for us, and they needed to be respected, nurtured, and listened to. However, even more important, for us the crew leaders and long termers, was to do everything in our power, to ensure the short term, weekly volunteers had a good experience. It was our job to listen to them, encourage them to share their thoughts, and encourage them to have fun!! If we do not have volunteers, we can't help clients, is what I believe the thinking was. As leaders, we spent some time figuring out who should go to what sites, and with what friends, and offered opportunities during the week to change things up. Since this was my 1st long term assignment, it was a new perspective of MDS for me.

This was well reinforced by Linda, Mike's wife and office manager, as she insisted that as much as possible, at meal times and other gatherings, the weekly volunteers mix up with each other and staff to make sure we all shared our days experiences, and life stories with each other. It was not true team building, as we were only together for 1 week, but it was social and spiritual sharing of the kind that sticks with you and just makes you feel good.

Well later that Sunday, a couple of hours after our leadership meeting our 1st batch of weekly volunteers showed up. It was one group of 13 University of Bluffton Ohio students, helping us out, during their spring break. Instead of beaches and sand, they chose sanding and drywall dust. They were an inspirational group. I sensed that most of them would not have been able to afford a down south vacation, and this trip was kind of a replacement for being on a beach.

Everyone as always had a story. Meghan, the eldest of 6 siblings, was putting herself through school by, living at home and working on the side. She planned to graduate debt free, then borrow a lot of money to go to a medical school and become a doctor. Anneliese was studying languages and their affect on society. For her thesis, she was planning on, get this, writing a play in 3 languages about women of distinction, whom society forgot about. On women she was planning to include was Ching Shih a Chinese female pirate who commanded 80,000 outlaws (you have to google this to get an idea of what this woman accomplished in her life). Had she been a man, there would be countless movies about her. John was kind of an athletic guy, who planned on being involved in professional sports and was taking accounting.

Every morning as with all MDS sites, volunteers are asked to signup to lead a simple devotional time. We had no shortage with this group. One memorable devotion for me was the story we all know, of hiding a candle under a bushel. In this case we were asked to consider how often we wonder what kind of a difference, if any, ONE person can possibly make. Then we were asked to think about being led into a large underground cavern, in total darkness. After a few minutes, once your eyes have finished adjusting to NO light, one solitary match is struck. Will it not illuminate the whole cavern? To me this was a powerful visualization. Why would you hide your light under a bushel even if it is just one light.

An aside

The West Virginia 2016 floods happen mostly along riverbeds and streams. An unprecedented spring run off happened in a short period of time over 4 WV counties, including Greenbrier, and the area was declared a national disaster. FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) provided funding to help in restoration projects. They asked MDS to participate, and thus we helped as weekly volunteers back in March of 2017. Since then, West Virginia VOAD (Volunteers Active in Disaster) had received Federal and State funding to continue the work, as many residences had not been reached by the initial FEMA funding. VOAD in turn, asked MDS, who have a sterling reputation for good and efficient work, to help. This request was approved by MDS in 2019, and the MDS housing renewal projects were started up again in Jan 2020. Remarkably similar timelines, and approvals occurred for the MDS Bridges projects, which help restore private bridges to individual houses or groups of houses destroyed by the same flooding. The Bridges projects are still funded and ongoing.

Week 1 March 1-7

Monday morning arrived and we split up according to the plans we had made during our introductions Sunday evening. We had the 13 Bluffton University folks and existing crew leaders, Gord and Hank, and new crew leaders, Chuck and Ginny and myself, Erv, and of course our SD, site director, Mike.

Mike had started up this MDS site on January 2, from scratch and now had house 1, Morrison, and house 2, Gabbert, almost completed. We often refer to the houses by the client's name. So, house 3, or OJs house was being finished by Gord (crew leader) and Ginny new crew leader. It needed trim paint and install, and kitchen install. House 4, the Kensinger house needed handicap ramp, primer and finish paint, floors, kitchen and trim. Hank (crew leader, 2 weeks into a 4-week stint) was on it, and I was to take over from Hank. So, the Bluffton College team was split between the 2 houses. Chuck, new crew leader, with a couple of helpers spent the day making the hand railings for the handicapped ramps, and Mike ran around making sure we all had materials, clients were happy, and a bit of touch up on the almost completed houses.

So off we were through the beautiful West Virginia countryside to the Kensinger house with Hank our crew leader teaching us the ropes. Hank is from Winnipeg, in his late 40s and owns a one-man renovations business. You could call him a bit of a clown. His business cards read "More than 6 Reasonably Satisfied Customers" and features a customer quote "He starts slow and then tapers off". However, he does great work. When Mike, our site director, inspected his drywall finishing work at the Kensinger house, he thought it was excellent. As an aside, Mike did mention that he'd seen one, slightly better dry walling job, done by a professional dry waller 2 weeks earlier. He was a 16 year old, Old Order Mennonite boy, who helped a crew of 4 hang all the drywall in one day, then, by himself, using stilts completed in 4 days, all the mudding, taping and sanding of an 1100 sq ft house – incredible).



Back to Hank. He is a GREAT storyteller and will fill in any conversations with his own interesting stories. He does a month of MDS work every year, as a crew leader. He had 2 weeks left in his term when we got to site. As we got past introductions, I realized that he too, had been in Greenbrier with us in 2017, as a crew leader at the time. I remember not being overly impressed with him, as he would spend 30 to 40 minutes explaining to a new person how a circular saw worked. I viewed it, back then, as a waste of time. Well this patience of his paid high dividends with our Bluffton College kids. Hank spent most of Monday, explaining the ins and outs

of a mitre saw, a circular saw and the various angles we would find, in the building of a 40ft handicapped ramp. By Wednesday, he was off to another house, leaving me in charge. Well, 2 of the folks he had trained, who were scared of a saw when he started, could with NO supervision, cut, with mitre and circular saw, and install, by predrilling and angle driving of screws, all the ramp railings with their complicated angels. I was impressed with Hank's teaching and the girl's fearlessness.

One funny thing happened earlier on in this teaching assignment he gave himself. He naturally, at the beginning, would have to check any progress regularly, to make sure no mistakes were being made which there were many. Trying to be positive in all this was Hank's way, and one time he was heard to remark "Well it's not terrible". We all picked up on this and from then on even good work was given the thumbs up followed by "it's not terrible". Then we would have a good chuckle as we remembered how many mistakes we made at the beginning of the week.

As week 1 rolled on, we split our team up depending on weather, and who we had between finishing the ramp, and finishing the dry wall sanding and touch up to be ready for painting the following week.

Tuesday, Chuck went to the 5th house, the Miller house, to help with fill in pouring of brick foundation walls, Gord and Ginny kept going with their crew at OJ's house and Hank and I kept going with ramp and dry wall at Kensinger.

There was a local church that was rebuilding, on higher ground as they had money. They had the exterior frame up and needed a bunch of interior framing done. That day a crew of 10 Old Order farmers, dairy, cattle, even fresh produce farmers, showed up in a couple of mini vans, driven by volunteers, and in one day got it all done. They had dinner with us that night, shared stories, and then they were gone, back to their farms.

Hank went off with 4 of the students and started framing house 4, the Miller house, leaving me with a reduced crew to finish the ramp and get the dry wall ready for painting on week 2. They ran into several problems, one of which was a lack of a Johnnie On The Spot. The guys would go behind a bush or shed some place. This became known as "I'm gonna go look for some deer". Of course, not everyone was in on this turn of phrase, and one of the young women, said excitedly, that she would like to come along with Hank and look for deer. This got a mighty laugh at report after dinner that night (it is MDS practice to have report after dinner every evening, where each site gives an update on their progress and events of the day).



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Our client, Kattie Kensinger, showed up one day, walking down the street. She looked after a disabled son, and temporarily, stayed with her sister, one or 2, towns over. We dropped our tools and, using the almost finished ramp, showed her around her new house, for the 1st time. She was generally very pleased, however she was disappointed that the only exits to the house were withing 10ft of each other, leaving the back bedroom area far from an exit, (she had great fear of fire), and that there was no wall space in the living room, dining room area (which was true). As I looked the house again from her perspective, a better design should have been possible. However, it was a standard VOAD design modified to accept a handicapped ramp. At report that night, I mentioned Kattie's comments and slid in my comment "that I told Kattie that "Mike will fix those things up"", which got a chuckle but of course was not true. Mike was our great fixer, but those fixes, were out of his range. Mike did mention, that Kattie complained about these 2 issues from day one, but sometimes you must be happy with what you get. I think she was in general.

After dinner and report, was free time, except for Mike and the crew leaders. We would typically have a meeting, to review progress, realign crews, if needed, and report material shortages. Mike had detail designs for each house including material breakouts, that were constantly updated by other site directors. It was not unusual to see him at 5:30am, or 9:00pm looking over drawings and making notes. I found out in week 2, when I joined him, that the local Lowes Hardware, would open at 6:00am. Mike would hustle down there every morning, and pickup what ever we needed for that day and be back for breakfast at 7:00.

By the end of the week, the Bluffton folks felt that much work was accomplished and they were happy they had made the

trip. On day one, they had all arrived with purple team shirts, reading Bluffton University, then SERVE, then "love your neighbor as yourselves". As they were leaving, they presented us with one of their shirts. It was perfect!!!!



Bob

It was Saturday morning (Saturday and Sunday's are normally free time for long term volunteers) and I had agreed to go to Lowes with Mike and Hank to help pickup the kitchen cabinets for OJ's house. Well of course, the Lowes guys were not ready for Mike, despite him asking the staff to have everything ready. So, he went off to find his kitchen. Near the contractor's counter were tools – OF COURSE – and I went off to ogle over them. Lowes gave Mike an exceptionally good discount and I was considering buying some DeWalt cordless drivers. While I was standing there looking at the tools a local contractor came and out of the blue, struck up a conversation with me. His voice had a country singer twang, that West Virginia folks in general all have.

He saw which tools I was looking at, and before I knew it, had spent at least 10 minutes explaining to me which tool was the best and all his poor experiences with the other brands. To myself I wondered how a busy contractor had time to tell me all the ins and outs of these tools. I had time on my hands, so I was patient with him. Mike and Hank were still off kitchen hunting, and so I did a lot of listening. Soon the conversation changed. As I listened, my thoughts, which were to edge out of the conversation, and find Dave and Hank, turned to fascination, as more and more of his story came forward.

It turned out that he recently had been on deaths door. He had an incident at home where he blacked out. When he came too, he was in an ambulance on his way to hospital. His blood pressure was 300/220 – astounding. They got him just in time and stabilized him. In his life he'd never seen a doctor – he was 55ish.

He is married and has 2 teenage sons. Feeling the weight of these responsibilities, he took his doctors advice seriously and drastically changed his diet. He was down to 220lbs and his current health was excellent, he told me.

Then the subject changed again. He had been a rowdy youth, until he met the love of his life a beautiful woman, whom he loved dearly. Then after 10 years of marriage, she left him. He was devastated, in deep depression, and alcohol abusive, for several years. His father would come and tell him it was over, he had to forget her. Even now by the sound of his voice, I sensed he was still in love with her. Somehow, he managed to get out of his depression and start a new life, with a new wife, and now had teenage sons. He went to church – had no vices, “well I use cuss words, but that is it” he said. Above all he never lied and was absolutely honest in all his dealings. There were many other parts to the story, which I’ll not bore you with, but suffice it to say that he must have spent 45 minutes talking to me and me 5 minutes to him. Occasionally, he’d catch his breath and ask me what I was doing there. I told him about MDS, and he thought that was pretty darn good of us. By the time he started to wind down, it was time for me to go as David and Hank were loading big boxes onto the trucks. We finished up with “Well my name is Bob and as you can tell, I’ve had a tough life – please pray for me”, and then he gave me a big hug. I was kind of astounded, and looking for words, and mumbled that I would. And I do. When I got over to truck, Mike and Hank asked, “What that was all about”. I told them that Bob asked me to pray for him. They smiled, nodded their heads, and did not ask any further. This is the 1st time I’m sharing the story with anyone.

We then proceeded to drop off the cabinets at OJ’s house. This was my 1st visit to the house. Non MDS volunteers had framed and roofed it but run out of time and given it back to VOAD uncompleted. VOAD in turn asked MDS to finish it up, to which we agreed. It presented interesting issues, and the previous volunteers, were truly volunteers. It was with some dismay that Gord, after drywalling was completed, found door openings with incorrect dimensions, and windows in the wrong locations. This caused quiet a bit of consternation and rework.

However, it was small potatoes compared to the owners, the OJ and Shante Cale family. Their house had been damaged by the flood, and sustained heavy mold damage, to the point that it was declared uninhabitable. After missing on the earlier flood relief support, they managed to get VOAD \$ in 2019 after living in their mostly destroyed house since 2016. Their building site was such that their house had to be removed (the house was demolished in October) in order for a new one to be built. The couple have 4 children plus 2 adopted children, for a total of 8 family members. A friendly bachelor just up the street had agreed to let the family use his 2-bedroom house during the construction, and he moved into a shack on his property, with no heat or water. VOAD thought they would have Cale family in their new house in time for Christmas. So here we were in mid March and they were getting anxious. That Saturday we also visited House 1 and 2, and then went over to House 4 the Miller house. The family again had been living in a rotting mold infested house, which was torn down and a new footing installed. The house was well off the ground, and most of the framing required scaffolding for house access.



The picture shows the house about 8ft off the ground. You can just make out the house trailer in the background, the family used for temporary accommodation. About 100 yards to the right is the stream, currently about 4 ft across that had flooded them out in 2016.

Around lunch that day, as the 3 of use were enjoying a DQ milk shake, Mike got a txt from his daughter-in law, who was planning on arriving Sunday with her husband (Mike and Linda’s son who farms cattle with them and lives in their old farmstead) and young family. She was going to be assigned to me and Kensinger house to get it painted. That never happened. Saturday morning her eldest son, about 10 years old, fell out of the haymow (I would call it a hay loft), about 10ft down onto a freshly cleaned out concrete floor. By Sunday, it was determined they would not be coming down, much to the disappointment of Mike and Linda. After trips to local, then further away hospitals and expert doctors, the good new was the young lad was fine. Mike shared that he himself as a young boy had fallen out of the same loft, onto his head. At the time his mom told him to smarten up. The apple I guess does not fall far from the tree.

Sunday - Esther and I spent a bit of time exploring around



the area and found a beautiful hiking trail along the Greenbrier River (yes the river that flooded and causes all these problems). We had a good 3 hour walk in warm spring conditions, with buds everywhere getting ready to break.

(to be continued in next edition)

Following God's Calling

by Debbie Peters

Becoming an Elementary School Teacher

I've often wondered what God was thinking when he decided that I should become a teacher one day. If you knew me as a child, you'd be amazed that I ever chose to become a teacher. Being extremely introverted, I never raised my hand in class, I spoke so softly that I could hardly be heard, and I always dreaded that awful time of the school year when we were forced to write and present our own memorized speeches to the class (or any oral presentations, for that matter!) Yes, I was definitely not the best candidate for becoming a teacher.

Yet, I spent countless hours playing "school" at home with my dolls, or with some of my friends during play-dates. I also enjoyed helping others who were struggling to learn things that I found to be easier, and French happened to be one of these subjects. I absolutely loved learning French, so while considering what kind of profession I could possibly make out of this, it seemed only natural to choose teaching! It was also helpful that I just adored my high school French teacher, because he helped to build up my confidence and self-esteem through countless words of praise and encouragement. In hindsight, this all seems to have been God's plan. All of my experiences and the key people I've encountered along the way have helped to shape me into the person and the teacher I am today. God seems to have always provided me with whatever I needed along the way in order to fulfil His purpose for me.

So, why am I sharing all of this with you at this moment in time? Well, being diagnosed with stage 1 breast cancer really does something to your state of mind - it brings you face to face with your mortality, and forces you to reflect on your life and on what you've done with it so far. I've been thinking about how I got to where I am today, and how God has always been there guiding me along the way. It's because of Him and his gentle calling that I became a member of our church's Education Committee, and why I have been teaching Sunday School for the last few years. With our discussions at meetings often being centred around the current state of NUMC's Children's Ministry and how difficult it has been to find volunteers, I also began reflecting on the reasons why I first decided to teach Sunday School...

Becoming a Sunday School Teacher

I'd love to tell you that I jumped at the chance to teach Sunday School when I first received that phone call, but unfortunately, I can't. Instead, a number of reasons why I shouldn't do it raced through my head. With teaching being my career through the workweek, I felt like I needed a break from it on weekends. During the school year, a great deal of my after-school and weekend time is also spent on preparation, marking and other school-related tasks, so I felt like teaching Sunday School would just add another day of "work" to my already busy week. And on top of all this, I was also feeling like I wasn't really qualified to be teaching the Bible to students, because I was definitely no expert in theology. Nevertheless, I knew how badly volunteers were needed, and if I didn't say "yes", would they be able to find anyone else who would teach my children?

So, I did agree to volunteer, and wouldn't you know it, I'm so very thankful that I did! As it turns out, everything that I was feeling reluctant about wasn't really an issue in the end. Originally, I was worried about how much time preparing for Sunday School would take out of my weekly schedule, but there isn't really much time needed for this at all. The new Meeting House curriculum that we are using is so well-planned and easy to follow, that anyone with any amount of knowledge of the Bible can feel comfortable teaching it. It's even amazed me how virtually every lesson I have taught my class has also had a meaningful message for me (by the way, I learned that Moses and the prophet Jeremiah were also afraid to speak in front of an audience, but God provided them with what they needed to overcome their fears!) In the Fall, there were some of us who attended the annual Toronto Children's Ministry Conference at Wycliffe College, and I found this to be very informative and helpful for someone like me who was relatively new to teaching Sunday School. It's great how much support is available out there to anyone who needs it!

With all of this being said, I'm hopeful that maybe something I have written regarding my own experiences has resonated with some of you. If you have also heard God's call to become more involved in our church or in Children's Ministry, consider how you might be able to donate a little of your time in some way. Our Sunday School is very much in need of more support - we have the extremely important task of helping to nurture our next generation of Christians and NUMC members, after all! And you can take it from me, all of those issues that are holding you back from volunteering are probably not as problematic as you think they are! There are a variety of tasks for any comfort level or time schedule, from baking or organizing activity stations and administrative tasks/prep work during the week, to welcoming children or leading large or small groups on Sundays.

All in all, I am very grateful to be doing what I'm doing today. God is amazing in how He works, and I feel truly blessed with how He has brought me into His service. He has given me the gifts I have, and I am happy to be sharing them with our church community, and to be using them to do His work!

Examples of Ways in which you can become involved in NUMC Children's Ministry:

Baby and toddler ministry – sharing the love of Jesus with even the youngest in our community

Administrative tasks - photocopying/prepping curriculum materials, gathering supplies

Tech Support - for weekly videos, A/V, etc.

Welcoming families - signing our kids in and out and greeting parents before and after Sunday School

Baking/prepping coffee and tea for the parents who are going to start gathering more formally on Sunday mornings

Connection Stations - changing up the kids' activity stations from time to time, keeping them clean and stocked and organized

Music leader – selecting and leading fun and engaging music for children to learn

Large Group Leaders – leading 20-minute intro sessions for a large group of children

Small Group Leaders – leading 20 minute lessons that follow the large group session, with a small group of children



Celebrating 40 years in Canada.

**THANK YOU FAMILY, FRIENDS, SPONSORS
WHO HAVE HELPED TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE
IN MY LIFE.**

Hi Marlene,
We are thinking of you and your extended family during this special day.
Thanks again so much for what you all have done for us.
Have a great summer.
Best regards,
Dung and family

This Easter card was received by Marlene Heidebrecht from Dung, in the name of his family who were NUMC's refugee family from Viet Nam in 1980—through MCC.

DmD 07/19/19

My MCC Memories

For me to share my MCC experience with you I will have to ask you to travel down memory lane with me because what I am about to write about isn't so much about a time and place but about the aromas, sights and sounds of a place that sits in the back of both Willi's and my minds. It's almost like a second language – it comes out at so many different times. I can be walking down a path in Virgil and see the sun shining from a certain place in the atmosphere and it brings me back to the early sun in Gaborone. Or, we can be sharing thoughts of different places of worship and our minds turn back to the African faces of our Sunday school students that we taught the word of God to in the Anglican Church; and the exuberant singing by the Batswana (the people of Botswana) in the Assembly of God church that we attended. Oh, yes, then there's the sound of Willi's Honda motorcycle with me on the back with my guitar strapped over my shoulder on our way to Bible Study (dressed in a long traditional dress).

I smell the smoke from someone's chimney and I am transferred into the driver seat of the MCC vehicle very early one morning in Selibe Pikwe, making my way through the thick wall of smoke from the villager's fires which are made to keep them warm in the rondavals (round homes made from cow dung and thatched roofs) and heat the water for the morning breakfast. The sight of a fire in the night remind me of the orange flames flickering from a fire being stoked in the dark by a volunteer whilst I slept on their couch in their rondaval. That brings me to a memory of another home I slept in where I didn't close my eyes all night as they were used to snakes slithering in under their door step. When morning came we loaded up their goods, as they were leaving early due to things not working out during their term in Serowe, and wouldn't it be suitable to add to things going wrong that, as the fridge was being loaded on the truck, someone gave it a bit of an extra push and it went flying from the side of the truck over to the other side of the truck only to roll down the hill!



In Botswana you don't knock at a door – you approach and call 'KoKo' and someone inside will

answer, "Tsena" (enter). When you shake a hand of a Motswana, you put the left hand over the right arm as a show of respect. You ask how they are and they ask you how you are. Then you ask how their spouse is, how their mother and fathers are, how their children are, etc. (this is done in their Motswana language). As a white person speaking to a Motswana in their language we gained their love and

trust just by trying and it gave them such a great laugh to hear what came out. When we went for our morning jog we would see a huge morning sun coming up over the horizon. We would yell out 'dumella, mma (or rra), which is the traditional 'hello', to everyone we met. We had a banana tree in our garden and vegetables and moles who ate the vegetables. It was not unusual to look out onto the tarmac, which passed in front of our house, and see a cobra in the middle of the road. As the cars went by it would flatten itself and come back up after the car went over it. It was when we couldn't see the snake anymore that worried us as we didn't know if it was slithering around in our grass outside the house ready to pounce. (our grass, by the way, was all crab grass which we planted!) I must be honest and tell you that I did shed tears when they showed us the house we were to live in for three years. . I longed for home then more than any time I could remember! Each room had a door that went outside into a courtyard which meant that in the middle of the night, if you needed to go to the kitchen for a class of water you had to go out the bedroom door and over to the other side of the courtyard to the door that went to the living room, which was joined to the kitchen. Yes, if you had to go to the washroom you had no choice but to go outside the bedroom and around the corner to the washroom.



The inconvenience came when it was pouring rain, or when the rains stopped and the flying ants shed their wings and were just pushing to get inside the door. It was not unusual to see a pile of wings outside the doors in the morning. As with anything, we became very comfortable with our 'home' and were sad after two years of living there that we had to move. We were given two days to find another place, kill, feather, and freeze our 21 chickens and say goodbye to our maid.

Oh, yes, here is another 'sight' that I can share with you. We let our maid share our fridge only to come home from work one day to find a cow's head with flies all around it. Needless to say that 'sight' disappeared very quickly. Our ways were so very different from theirs.

MCC taught us about people and cultures, about a different language and social structure. It taught us that life isn't about having things but having people you can laugh with and taking time for them. It taught us that we are not a superior race and others can teach us so much. I was the Administrative Secretary to the Director of MCC Botswana. After working a full day it was not unusual to come home to people sitting in our courtyard needing a place to stay for the night or the week.



Youth Group preparing a garden



Planting crabgrass

An MCC guesthouse was eventually built which took a great deal of stress off the MCCer's in Gaborone as Botswana had 50 MCCer's throughout the country, always coming and going. My interaction was much more with the MCCer's than the local people as it was my responsibility to pick them up from the airport when coming to the country, go through immigration with them, get them settled in their new home, take care of their needs or take them to the airport when leaving the country. Much interaction with the locals was when Willi and I were sponsors for a local youth group which was fun but also a challenge.

MCC guesthouse/cook/gardener



Our first Christmas in Africa



I turned 21 in Africa. That is something that, still to this day, makes me shake my head. We grew up in Africa. We only had each other to turn to when sad, happy, homesick, or just sick! We missed many of our family weddings, learned of terrible accidents that happened to members of our family three weeks later via mailed letters, received Christmas cookies in the mail, learned to wait in line for very long lengths of time to get our mail, and had to get used to a very difference pace of life. There were no cell phones or emails. There weren't computers, Facebook or twitter. We had to schedule phone calls as the only phone for us to use was at the MCC office. But we could drop in any time to fellow volunteers (not just MCCer's), made very close ties with people all over the world, and saw that God was everywhere and in everyone. We went as MCCer's, socialized with fellow volunteers, went to an African Assemblies' church, taught Sunday School with Anglicans at an Anglican church, had Bible study with people from many different religions, and attended a Baptist fellowship.



Going overseas for three years excited us. We were ready for the adventure. We missed out on a lot of things at home but we share a bond that we don't have with anyone else and wouldn't trade those three years of our lives for anything.



~ Submitted by Linda Pankratz

Here's a poem that fits our time, too. Although it was composed hundreds of years ago it shows us that our world is filled with sorrow and suffering. But our Lord feels what we feel, may it be joy or sorrow, both by humans or animals or even tiny birds and infants. (It was also set to music for us today by Jane M. Marshall.)

Can I See Another's Woe? by William Blake

Can I see another's woe and not be in sorrow too?
 Can I see another's grief, and not seek for kind relief;
 Can I see a falling tear, and not feel my sorrow's share?
 Can a father see his child weep, nor be with sorrow filled,
 Can a mother sit and hear an infant groan, an infant's fear?

No, no, never can it be! No, no never can it be!

And can He who smiles on all, hear the wren with sorrows small.
 Hear the small bird's grief and care,
 Hear the woes that infants bear.
 And not sit beside the nest, pouring pity in their breast;
 And not sit the cradle near, weeping tear on infants' tear.
 And not sit both night and day, wiping all our tears away?

O no! never can it be! Never, never can it be!

He doth give His joy to all - He becomes an infant small,
 He becomes a man of woe, He doth feel the sorrow too.
 Think not you can weep a tear, and Thy Maker is not near?
 O, He gives to us His joy, that our grief He may destroy;
 Till our grief is fled and gone - He doth sit by us and moan.

Mary Pries



In our younger years when we lived in Asuncion the MCC office and the Menonite Home were located in that city. That was a big benefit for our small Menonite Community in Asuncion. The office and the Home were the center for our gatherings and activities. Without them we Mennonites there would have become pretty scattered and lost. In our youth and younger years we never ever asked who paid for all the events like youth picnics and trips, the Sunday evening meals, the taking care of our mail and so much more. And so we didn't feel any special gratitude towards MCC. Oh, we knew that MCC paid for all of that, but who was MCC? MCC was a North-American organization (we didn't distinguish between Canada and the States) and in North-America everybody was rich, people there had dollars. We got to know just about all the MCC workers that came to Paraguay and with quite a few we became friends, with some even friends for life. We never ever lost any thought about that they might have left behind a comfortable home, close friends or maybe even a good job. We thought they lived pretty comfortable in Asuncion compared to us, and that was that. We, as the takers were pretty ignorant about where it all came from. Years later we got a glimpse of **the other side**, the givers.

When we moved to Canada many years later, things were very different for us. The first couple of years we were busy settling in. There was no MCC home where everybody gathered and so we felt very lonely. We found it very tough, but in time things got better. We made new friends and even started to travel a bit. Erika and Frank Siemens were our good travel buddies. We drove west to Vancouver island and east to Newfoundland. Eventually we ventured out to the States and it is one of these trips I want to tell you about.

We came from Washington D.C. and looked for overnight lodging in the Lancaster, Pennsylvania area. Well the people in the tourist office didn't have much to offer us. For some reason the motels were all full, well, any places that we thought we could afford, were. The attendant, who obviously was an Amish or Old Mennonite lady had a B&B place for us. Now, while Waldemar didn't mind B&B, I felt a bit uneasy about it . I liked privacy and space. So there we were, what to do? It had been a long drive, it had been a hot day, still was, and we were all tired. So, I was overruled and we took the B&B. I was not happy about it. This place was somewhere in the boonies, so that somebody had to drive ahead of us and show as the way, which they happily did. It was actually a beautiful drive on tree lined roads and healthy looking cornfields on both sides. And then we drove onto a yard with a friendly looking farmhouse surrounded by a cornfield with at least six feet tall or higher cornstalks. The owner was already expecting us and greeted us very warmly. His name was Mr. Herr, obviously an Old Mennonite as it looked like. As I said, the day had been very hot, so we were all wearing shorts and very summery looking tops. We felt a bit out of place in front of this very proper dressed looking man. Before I could warn Waldemar not to mention that we were Mennonites, he already opened his mouth and said: "Oh, Mr Herr, you are a Mennonite, we are Mennonites too." And before Mr. Herr could say anything, Waldemar added "Mennonites from Russia" Well, then Mr. Herr's mouth dropped open, his expression changed totally and his eyes lit up . "You are the first Mennonites from Russia I have met. I want to visit with you people, I **have** to visit with you" he said. "When are you going to bed? Because my wife and I have to be in church for a meeting in a little while but we will come home as soon as possible. Are you very tired? Because I really **need** to visit with you." We assured him that we would stay up until their return home. We were wondering what had made him so excited, but we all took a shower, got refreshed and it didn't take so long until the Herrs got home, still quite anxious to talk to us.

We settled down on the porch with a cup of coffee and then our visit began. Mr. Herr wanted to know all about us, from Russia to Germany to Paraguay, the whole bit. And he was very interested in every little detail of our life's stories. And then he told us his story. Right after WWII MCC had called on the Mennonites in North America for commitments and donations to help the brothers and sisters that were refugees in Germany. MCC had come to their church too and he and his first wife had been to that meeting. After hearing about the grave situation and the urgent need to get those people out of Germany because of the harassment of the Communists, he felt overcome with compassion and he committed to a generous amount. But when he looked across the isle where his wife was sitting, he knew he had committed to too much. They had a young family. But he stayed by his pledge and had eventually payed what he had promised. We were quiet for a moment when Waldemar said: "Mr Herr, if it hadn't been for people like you, this lady (pointing to Erika) would not be here today." And then we told him the whole story of the more than 1,000 Mennonites refugees trapped in Berlin that Erika had been part of and how MCC had gotten them out of there on to a ship for Paraguay. "**Then**" Mr. Herr said, slapping his thigh with his flat hand "**then it was worth every penny of it!**" The next morning we said a very warm Good bye to the Herrs, we never saw or heard from them again but his testimony will stay with us for ever. "Then it was worth every penny of it."

It was a good thing that we ended up in the Herr's B&B. We got a glimpse of the other side, the side of the givers.

Ten Thousand Villages: Saying Good-Bye

By: Ellery Rauwerda

For the last 30 plus years, if you were to take a drive, walk, or bike ride down Queen Street in Niagara-on-the-Lake, you would have undoubtedly seen a very special store (or signs pointing you to one). If you took the time to step inside, you would have noticed instantly just how much this store stood apart. Instead of the typical Canada-themed knick knacks (notably NOT made in Canada), this store carried eclectic items produced worldwide. Instead of typical sales staff, you would likely have encountered the face of a volunteer. And instead of paying the wages of many employees and middlemen (leaving very little for those who actually produced the item), your purchase paid artisans and farmers around the world a living wage.

Ten Thousand Villages stood for more than the typical retail outlet. It modeled a different way of doing business, putting people before profit, and creating avenues for employment that brought dignity and worth. It is for these reasons that I was a very proud and vocal supporter of the work that Ten Thousand Villages did.

My connections with Ten Thousand Villages run deep. My Grandma Harder was on the original board that founded the Niagara-on-the-Lake store in 1986. Growing up, we would attend events at the store and pop by for visits. As I grew older, my interest in global issues grew too, out of my roots in the work of MCC and Ten Thousand Villages. I seized opportunities to travel to developing countries, completed a degree in Peace and Conflict Studies, and, in 2013, began working directly for Ten Thousand Villages as a summer student and then as assistant manager.

In my two years as an employee, my admiration for the values of Ten Thousand Villages only grew. I met artisans firsthand as they came to share their stories from their home countries. I consumed as much information as I could about the different products and their origins; nearly every item in the store came with a background information sheet on the materials it was made from and the community who produced it. These stories brought the items to life and gave legitimacy to Ten Thousand Villages' claims of caring deeply about not only people but also our earth and the resources we have. I visited Level Ground, the coffee supplier for Villages, in BC during a family vacation, just for fun. Mark and I even took wedding photos in and in front of the store because of its significance in our lives, and when we traveled Southeast Asia for four months in 2018, we stopped in at four different organizations that supply Ten Thousand Villages with products, meeting producers face-to-face in Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Indonesia.



And as I learned more and more about the model of Fair Trade - about putting people before profit, about the human need for dignity and purpose alongside financial stability, about the value of knowing who's on the other side of the items that fill our homes - I eagerly shared my knowledge and passion. I led workshops and simulations in schools from grade two to high school. I gave presentations in churches and community spaces, and helped to organize and execute offsite sales. My own home filled with Villages products and the values of Fair Trade infused themselves into our own consumption habits, from art and pillows to socks and sweaters to coffee and chocolate. Even now, as I sit typing this in my living room, I can spot over a dozen items made by the artisans I've grown to care deeply about.



Perhaps it is quite understandable then, that when on January 21st I first learned that Ten Thousand Villages in Canada would be shutting its doors permanently, I was heartbroken. In an era where it's trendy to be eco-conscious and concepts of "small scale" and "community-based" are in, I would have thought that Ten Thousand Villages - the pioneer of this now popular movement - would have been at its peak. I felt terribly let down by humanity as I ruminated on how this could have happened.

In the weeks and months that have passed since this announcement, I've had the time and space to reflect on this. The initial sting of the shock has worn off and left behind a small ache as I've walked past a now empty storefront where Villages stood. It's an ache rooted in the loss of something that I held so dear, on so many levels. Ten Thousand Villages in Niagara-on-the-Lake was a great source of pride for me because of my grandma's involvement. It was where I forged really special relationships with volunteers and where I cultivated a deep sense of appreciation for the interconnectedness of our world. It's where I learned to value quality, where I made commitments to make changes in my own life, where I developed a habit of thinking over the impact of my purchases before I make them. Certainly I'm not flawless at it, but it is impossible now to be ignorant to the impact of my choices, and that awareness helps hold me accountable.

As I think about it, the impact that Ten Thousand Villages had will not - cannot - shut down along with the stores. The movement started by its founder, Edna Ruth Bylar, in 1946, lives on in the over 7,000 Fair Trade certified products now available in Canada. It lives on in the ability to easily track down and purchase ethically produced alternatives to many common household goods - coffee, cocoa, tea, sugar, spices, bananas, and more. It lives on in me as I continue to seek quality products that promote dignity, compassion, and justice for those producing them.

The evidence of our interconnectedness could not be stronger in light of the current reality we find ourselves living. We NEED to care about each other, and we need to demonstrate our care in every and any way we can. If ever there was a season in our lives to make changes, this is that season. We've been given the time we say we never have, the slower pace we seem to all be chasing, the "less" lifestyle we espouse to want. Perhaps the closure of Ten Thousand Villages is timely. Perhaps it helps shed light on the gap between who we are and who we want to be. Perhaps it is a wakeup call that when we talk without acting, we cannot possibly expect change to occur. And as Ten Thousand Villages - and indeed the entire world around us - closes its doors, perhaps when doors open again, we'll walk out into a world that is just a bit more mindful, a bit more grateful, a bit more compassionate. Perhaps we'll feel our interconnectedness a bit more strongly, take it a bit less for granted, and, with our eyes open in new ways to the world around us, we'll make steps to close that gap between who we are and who we want to be, and find as many ways as we can to make this world a bit more loving, fair, and kind for all.

MCC Experience 1975 - 1978

~ Submitted by Willi K. Pankratz

MCC is a non-profit charity organization that provides relief and Christian service in the name of Christ. It is a peace agency representing 15 Mennonite, Brethren-in Christ and Amish bodies in North America. It was founded in 1920 and this year is celebrating the Centennial service of the Ministry. The service is provided in "In the Name of Christ".

Linda and I served in MCC from 1975 to 1978 in Gaborone, Botswana, Southern Africa. Linda worked as Administrative Secretary to the Director of MCC at the MCC office/guesthouse in Gaborone. I worked as a Surveyor for the Department of Surveys and Lands of the Botswana Government.

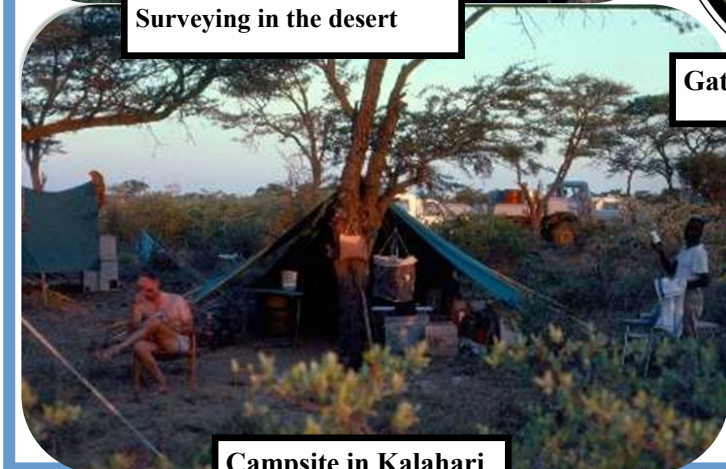
We had just been married one year, young, idealistic, and wanting adventure and the opportunity to serve in our vocations overseas in MCC. After a 2-week orientation session in August 1975 in Akron, Peninsula USA, we flew to our new home in Gaborone, Botswana. Everything was new. A time of discovery, a new culture, new language, new home, new climate, job, friends and strangers. We were outside our familiar comfort zone. We experienced God's amazing presence throughout our time there and it was truly a memorable experience that had a profound effect on our outlook in our lives.



Willi's Survey team in Kalahari



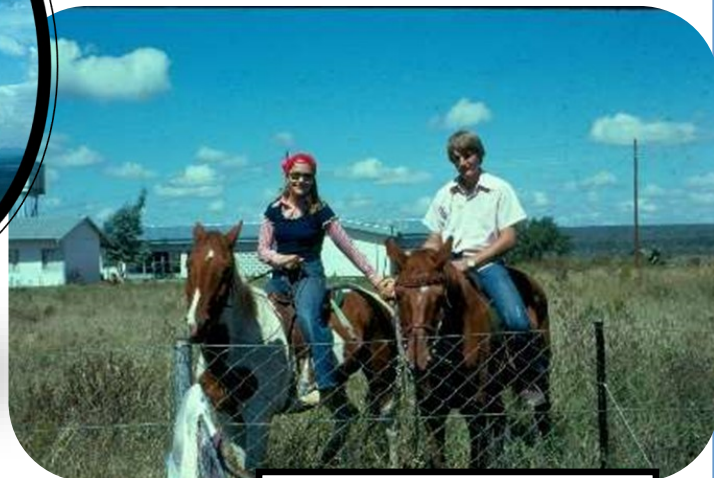
Surveying in the desert



Campsite in Kalahari



Survey Beacon



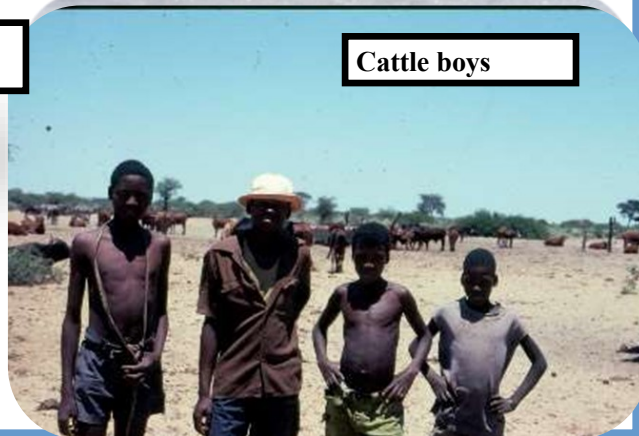
Horse riding in Molepolole



Gathering water



Kids in Mahalapye



Cattle boys

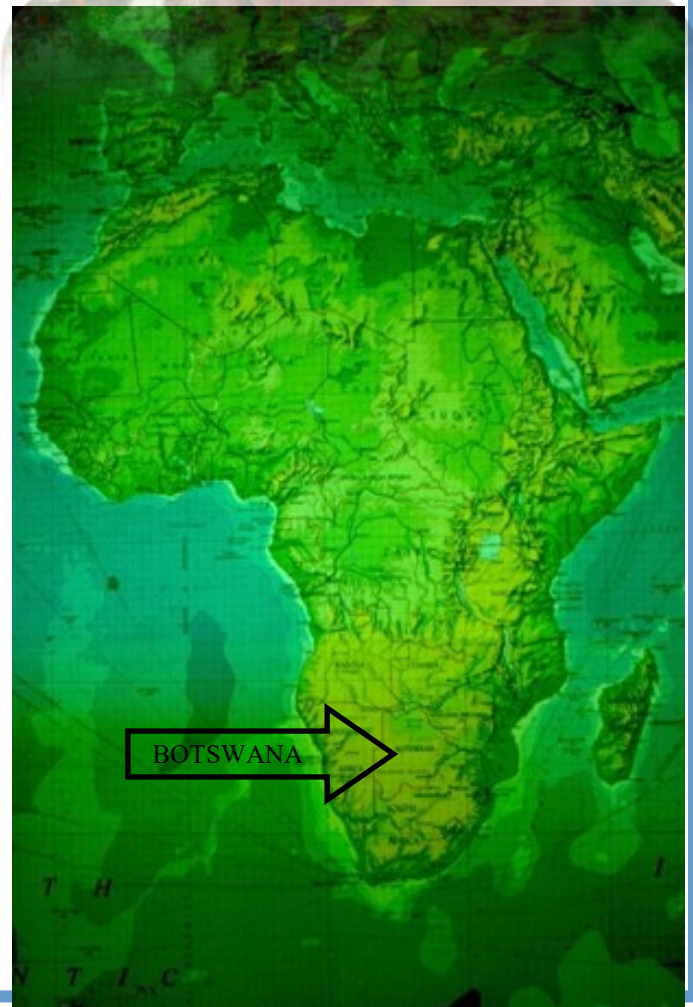
We gained a deeper faith, long lasting friendships, and a broader outlook at the world around us. It was awe inspiring. God taught us much as we experienced loneliness, frustrations and joy and fulfillment in living in Southern Africa (SA). SA was experiencing political tension and conflict as Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), Mozambique and South Africa were in the throes of gaining political independence.

Both Linda and I had full time jobs. In my job as a Survey Technical Officer, seconded by MCC to the Gaborone Government, I went to various locations in the country surveying the land, subdividing plots of land for residential and industrial development. The country was experiencing rapid urban development. Mineral resources such as diamonds, iron ore, coal, etc. were in the process of being discovered and the orderly development of roads and land was urgently required. I had to learn their methods of surveying and the land regulations. My work was technically challenging and rewarding. I also had the opportunity to see the beautiful and stark country landscape as we did some mapping control work in the Kalahari Desert at Jwaneng mine. The site later became the richest diamond mine in the world!

Aside from work, we built new relationships with the people we came in contact with. These were also very rewarding. Communications with the local people had its challenges due to cultural and language differences. In the Capital city of Gaborone, many people did understand some English. They also understood the body language of love and care. Many had understood the message of the Gospel that had been brought to them as early as 1860 when **Doctor David Livingstone** had traveled and lived in Botswana near a town called Molepolole. The message of God's Love had transcended the cultural differences and language barriers. The Christian Church was alive and well. We saw many local Batswana dressing into their finest clothes marching to their local church on Sunday morning singing praises to God as they travelled on foot. It was truly amazing to experience the varied worship experiences such their speaking in tongues and dancing to the front of the Church holding their money high in their hands as they brought their Pula (their currency) to the offering plate.

There is much more I could tell you about our MCC experience in Botswana, but those experiences would only be second hand. I would like to challenge everyone to have their own God-awe inspiring experiences. We should be challenged to make a long-term commitment to service to God and the community we live in. After all, that really is our vocation to represent Christ.

Submitted by Willi K. Pankratz



*We would like to introduce you to **Ella Bartel**, our next NUMC artist. However, because of the COVID 19 pandemic and the resulting lockdown of our church building, we are unable to display Ella's art in our Art Gallery at this time. So here is a taste of more to come once the social distancing is lifted. We will celebrate Ella Bartel's artistic gifts when life returns to the new normal.*

ART MEMORY OF ELLA (JANTZ) BARTEL

Our family is pleased to share the art of Ella (Jantz) Bartel with you.

For those readers who are under 30, you won't remember her. Ella was born on April 22, 1928 (before it was named Earth Day), married (the late) Arno Bartel here at this church on June 23, 1951 and left this earth on June 25, 1995 when cancer claimed her life. That was 25 years ago and the reason for sharing our memories of her at this time.

Ella was an active member of the NUMC congregation, most often involved in the music ministry. Many came to know her as "Tante Ella" when she led the young Sunday School singing groups. For decades she sang in the church choirs, and also in a quartet and other ladies' groups. She even directed the German and funeral choirs for a time.

But there was a less obvious but more visible gift that she shyly and humbly shared with her family. In the early 1970's, Ella discovered the joy of painting. We all knew that she had an artistic touch, but it wasn't until she joined a painting class, that her art found expression. Her love of nature translated into lovely landscapes on canvas that beautified their home. Colour names like cyan, sienna and cerulean became part of our vocabulary. Family members who married during those years may have received an original painting as a wedding gift. Every canvas in her entire collection bore the same elementary artist's signature - a simply printed "Ella". We all enjoyed her new-found talent until the late 1980's, when her instructor passed away, the painting group disbanded and her focus shifted to other activities.

You may have seen a few of her paintings around the church in the last few months. You will find one (fittingly) in the choir room, also across the hall in the board room, and on the third floor in a meeting room. We seasonally adjusted a few pieces that were displayed in the main foyer as well.

We hope you enjoy her work and the memories it may revive of a beautiful person who is still loved and missed every day.

"For everything there is a Season, and a purpose under heaven." Eccl. 3:1

*Dick and Marlene (Bartel) Heidebrecht,
David, Sharon, Dylan and Karter Heidebrecht,
Ben and Bonnie Bartel*



LIFE WITH US NEWSLETTER

If you would like to submit any photos or articles for the newsletter, please contact any of the Newsletter Team of Editors:

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