

Dorothy M. Peters, with Christine S. Kampen, *Daughters in the House of Jacob: A Memoir of Migration*. Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2016. Pp. 275. Softcover, \$20.00.

This book resists classification into any particular genre. It is part memoir, part family history, part spiritual autobiography, and part migration story. If at times this makes it overly ambitious for a relatively slim volume, it is also what sets it apart from more conventional family histories. Professor of Biblical Studies, Dorothy M. Peters, is the principal author, and her cousin, Mennonite Brethren Pastor, Christine S. Kampen, is the co-author. The women “consciously carr[y] [their] vocational calling as a legacy” from their grandfather Jacob J. Doerksen, referenced in the title (5).

By tracing their roots and their family’s migration story from Russia to Canada, the women simultaneously track the roots of their spiritual heritage. The authors rely on archival research, genealogical records, personal correspondence, and oral history interviews with “elder-storytellers” (5) to trace their vocational heritage. The initial question prompting the research was, “how did we get here?” but by their own admission, the question they ultimately answer is, “who are we?” (272).

Each section takes the reader a generation further back into the women’s shared ancestry. First, the women reflect on their own vocational calling. Next, we learn about their parents – Peter’s father, Len, and Kampen’s mother, Betty – siblings, and Jacob’s two eldest children, both of whom were involved in ministry, Len as a Bible teacher and Betty as a lay leader, deacon, and the first woman board member of Columbia Bible Institute in Abbotsford, British Columbia. Next we learn about Jacob, the spiritual leader of the family, a charismatic personality who fled revolutionary Russia with his family in the 1920s and became a Bible teacher on the Ca-

nadian prairies. Finally, the spiritual legacy of Jacob's mother, the family matriarch, Agatha, is considered.

What elevates this book above most family histories is its emphasis and consideration of several themes throughout the work – the migration referenced in the title might just as easily refer to the evolution of ideas and attitudes held by the family over time, as to the physical migration across continents. Of particular relevance to the two protagonists are issues of gender – the role of women in leadership in the church, in this case the Mennonite Brethren Church, and the ways in which women's roles have expanded over time. Other themes include changing attitudes towards sexuality; the role and interpretation of Scripture; the effects of trauma on families, and the importance of storytelling as a spiritual and familial exercise.

The deliberate vulnerability of the authors – such as when they discover a child born to their great-grandmother out of wedlock (232) – is what makes the book most compelling, an honest reflection on a family's past. The role of suffering and its place in one's faith journey features prominently. Dorothy writes about the profound pain of losing her adolescent son in a car accident (44). She likens the waves of grief to the pain experienced while giving birth to him. As a new mother myself, I found this metaphor particularly poignant. This tragedy deeply affected her faith and her understanding of God (45). Christine writes about the long, quiet loneliness of singlehood and coming to accept her place as a single woman in the church (65). Their forebears endured intense suffering both in Revolutionary Russia and in Canada, including Jacob's untimely death, and the authors reflect on the generational impact of such trauma on their family (262).

The role of Scripture in the lives of the characters is a unifying thread, a centering anchor throughout. Dorothy writes about the ways in which the Bible is simultaneously a point of connection and tension in her relationship with her father (108). She writes of her longing to discuss Scripture with him – the interpretation and explication to which they've both devoted their lives – but because of their differing understandings, they struggle to find common footing and a safe and honouring way to engage in such conversations.

The book's strength is also its weakness. While the approach is creative, the multiplicity of voices is, at times, disorienting. It also occasionally feels like the work is intended for a closed audience, like the reader is peering into the closet of someone else's family, skeletons and all, a collection of familial anecdotes with more res-

onance inside the family than without. Overall, however, this book makes an important contribution to the conversation about women's roles in Christian ministry, and encourages readers to reflect on their own past and how it may have contributed to shaping their present.

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