

In Memoriam

Katie Funk Wiebe (1924-2016)



Katie Funk Wiebe died October 23, 2016, in Wichita, Kansas, at the age of 92, leaving a legacy of faith, storytelling and an invitation to live by choice, not by default. In addition to being an author, biographer, editor, columnist and essayist, Katie was a speaker, preacher, pioneer, prophet, provocateur, feminist, teacher, mentor and historian. In 2000, *The Mennonite* named her among the top 20 Mennonites with “the most powerful influence on life and belief of the...Mennonite Church in the 20th century.” She was a frequent contributor to the *Journal of Mennonite Studies*.

Katie was born September 15, 1924, in Laird, Saskatchewan, to Mennonite immigrants from Ukraine and grew up in Blaine Lake, Saskatchewan. A reading of a devotional book “called forth faith on my part to believe that God wanted something of me,” Katie wrote. In 1945, she was baptized and entered Mennonite Brethren Bible College, Winnipeg, where she met Walter Wiebe; they married August 21, 1947, and were called to Christian journalism.

Although religious journalism was dominated by men, Katie began to publish articles in *The Canadian Mennonite* and *Christian*

Living. In 1962, she began writing “Women in the Church” for *The Christian Leader*. The column became “Viewpoint” when Katie persuaded her editors that she had something to say to both women and men. Weeks after moving the family to Hillsboro, Kansas, having been ill for five years with a progressive disease, Walter died on November 17, 1962.

Early widowhood pushed Katie into the workforce to provide for her four children. While a copy editor and proofreader at the Mennonite Brethren publishing house, she continued to write freelance articles. In 1966, she became an English instructor at Tabor College, where she earned a BA in 1968. She earned an MA in 1972 from Wichita State University, and Tabor promoted her to associate professor in 1981. Katie wrote stories of “women who were often overlooked because they were not part of the official historical accounts.” By 1970, she was actively calling for a Mennonite Brethren study conference on “the position of women in the church.” Her first widely-read book, *Alone: A Search for Joy*, was published in 1976.

She became involved in many levels of denominational leadership: on the boards of the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, *Direction* journal, the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren, on Mennonite Central Committee taskforces and the publicity committee for the Mennonite World Conference Assembly in Wichita, and as editor of *Christian Leader* and *Rejoice!*

In 1990, she retired from Tabor as professor emerita and moved to Wichita in 1991, eager to serve the wider constituency of the church she loved; to bring meaning to her life through writing and speaking of her own experience of aging, the role of older adults and women in the church.

Katie wrote more than 2,000 articles, columns and book reviews, and wrote or edited more than two dozen books. In receiving the 2014 Leslie K. Tarr Career Achievement award from the Word Guild, she was described as “an agent of transformation; a life force that has pushed its way through the firmly packed soil of tradition.”

Katie was questing, curious, perseverant, loyal, invitational, loving, brave, true, a great story-teller and teacher, and always learning and growing.

Karla Braun, Winnipeg

This tribute to Katie Funk Wiebe first appeared in the January/February 2017 issue of the Mennonite Brethren Herald.