

Me Tarzan, Son of Menno— You Jane, Mennonite Mama

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Several years ago I offered to spend the night with my elderly and somewhat fearful neighbor whose husband was entering the hospital for treatment. I was in my fifties at the time. Her husband refused my offer. "There has to be a man in the house," he insisted. What an elderly, infirm man could do that I couldn't do was never clear to me. But Tarzan had to be around to protect Jane. In the Mennonite church, theologians and historians, Tarzans, have long been around to protect the women. But that is changing.

I have long been a student of Mennonite history, including Mennonite women's history. It has been a large part of my writing and thinking over the years. I have been interested in the women's movement in the Mennonite church since the early 1960s and closely involved in it since the early 1970s. For nearly four decades I have consciously observed the way women have become part of the Mennonite historical consciousness.

The question always comes up: Why be concerned about women's history? And the answer is still the same: Because the women are there. Because they have a history. Because they are part of Mennonite history. And because as a community we are more aware of them, this new consciousness, or awareness, means everyone's history must be rewritten. "Our newest worlds are sometimes in the past," someone has said. This conference is about discovering these newest worlds.

Futurist Elise Boulding writes about the underside/overside phenomenon in our cultures which seems to support a male dominance (Tarzan/Jane) view of history. This underlife/overlife culture strengthens the longstanding Mennonite hierarchical view of life. For several centuries of Mennonite history, the voice of authority, of reason, yes, even of God, was always male.

One of Flannery O'Connor's characters in her story "Revelation" is much concerned about always being on top of the heap in society. She argues with herself that if there is a top side there has to be a bottom. She's white, so she belongs on top. The blacks therefore are on the bottom. She struggles with the matter, but to her it's a natural phenomenon. Unless there is an upper structure, there is no basement. Unless there is an upperclass, there is no underclass. And she is sure she belongs to the upper class.

The white population in the United States, which has always been on top, can and has told its history without reference to African-Americans, but African-Americans cannot tell their story without reference to whites because it began in America with slavery—with the dominance of the white race over the black race.

Mennonite women, likewise, cannot tell their story without reference to the dynamics of gender. Mennonite men have always been prominent in the public domain, where significant decisions related to the whole group were made. Women were expected to remain in the private domain.

Certainly, men are affected by a feminine underside, but men can and have told their story (written histories) without reference to this feminine underside. Men can write history and leave out the women. Even in the most recent written histories of the Mennonites in America, despite several decades in which there has been a growing consciousness of women's role in the church, the women in these books are seen mostly through a low-lying fog. But more about that later.

Let's go back to Russia and early days in Canada. On the traditional Mennonite farm, work was divided between husband and wife out of necessity. The men worked outside on the land. They were the leaders in church and community, especially in Russia, where the government allowed them to regulate life in their own villages. Mennonites formed a strongly patriarchal society, like other Protestant groups growing out of the Reformation.

During the Mennonite interlude in Russia, and later in Canada, women worked inside the home baking the "Zwieback" and "Roggebrot" in the wall oven fired with straw. Sometimes a woman worked in the fields beside the men. The framework for the picture of the ideal Mennonite woman in Russia and in the early years in America was one that most Mennonites found comfortable: silence, modesty, and submission.

I can still see my immigrant father walking to church, about three steps ahead of Mother, and Mother calling to him to wait. She wanted the Canadian way, but he had no patience with it. Men moved ahead, took the risks, and women followed. Men walked into church in one door and women in the other. They sat in separate pews. The Bruderschaft (or church council) was represented only by

men. Men were concerned with theology, church structures, regulation of church polity and of public documentation of the community's history. This was the way it had always been done, and it seemed right and normal.

In 1978, in an article entitled, "The Barriers Are Not Real," I wrote about this earlier time as follows: "Women's place was not with the men. Not with thinking. Not with dreaming, declaring, determining sin, disciplining, deciding to stay or leave Russia. Her place was at home kneading the soft dough with strong hands, stripping milk from soft, warm udders, serving Prips and Schinkefleisch to tired men when they came home from the fields. Her place was cradling children into quietness; loving deeply without open words; praying silently with head covered."

I recall chuckling at the young Mennonite Brethren pastors in our area in Saskatchewan who visited with my pastor husband. I sensed how important it was for them to climb the trees of church and conference hierarchies and be able to declare from the treetops, "Me Tarzan!"—and how I bought into that. I can laugh now at how pleased I was when my husband was ordained to the ministry. I could now write not just Mrs. Walter Wiebe but Mrs. Reverend Walter Wiebe as my name. We young wives secretly gloated when our husbands got elected to key positions. We lived our lives through them because there was no opportunity to live them any other way. We couldn't clamber to the top branches of the tree after our husbands, but we could point them out swinging on the top branches to passersby.

**What factors have kept the historical gap open
between men and women in the Mennonite world?
Why haven't we had an enGendered history to date?**

1. Whoever controls words, or language, controls the Word. Classical rhetoric is a masculine discipline. The tradition of fighting orally with words, staking out one's turf, or debating, belonged to males. This is where we get the phrase "defending your dissertation." This striving to overcome through words was always male against male, never a male against a female. There were no women rhetoricians in American academics until recent decades. Men were threatened by women who could use rhetoric. When women began going to colleges and universities, they were taught analysis, not debate. They were directed into the field of essay writing while men stayed with debate. That idea that it is noble for men to do the agonistic work seeped into other fields, especially theology.

Until the most recent decades white male theologians did the polemical, or defending, work of the church, thereby controlling the public meaning of the gospel through their interpretations of Scripture. The same holds true for the Mennonite constituency.

At Mennonite Brethren Bible College, here in Winnipeg, about fifty years ago, in the first years, we women were advised not to enrol in theology classes

because we wouldn't need them. Only women who were going to be missionaries took theology. At the time I didn't really know what theology was, so it didn't bother me, but I wondered why there were gender specific classes. We women students took Christian education classes; men took theology. Sort of like in high school, where students took gender specific classes: boys took shop, girls took home economics. Obviously, to study theology required a higher mentality than what we women as a group had received.

For men legitimate authority to do theology is achieved by education, position, knowledge, personal charisma, and the wisdom of experience in church life. But often gender has been the first prerequisite. Young men are elected to positions in church councils or boards of elders ahead of highly experienced and educated women. Men have the authority of tradition backing them as polemicists; men have always been leaders in thought in the Mennonite church. Our Tarzans have been our male theologians. Our Janes have been our Mennonite mamas.

Until now few academic theologians have ever been women. Women have been suspect when they do theology, because their experience as members of the underside of Mennonite history and their emotions might influence the direction of their thought. Consequently, their thinking is not part of the public record. Women's influence was mostly through the oral communication of ideas.

Several years ago I did a study of the image of women in Mennonite fiction in *Visions and Realities; Poems and Fiction Dealing with Mennonite Issues*, edited by Harry Loewen and Al Reimer. What I found did not actually surprise me. Women's presence in these novels was felt rather than seen and heard, although there might be slight outbursts of courage and concern. Fathers gave permission and decided issues. Mothers explained, mended what was broken in body and spirit and carried the hurts of the family into the grave. Men invented machines and ideas. Women brought children into the world. They did not personally find grace for redemption, but received faith by the process of osmosis through the virtue of being a wife.

The theologian moves from biblical text to hermeneutical interpretation to application to life, never the other way around. That procession in the development of theology is true in theory, yet any theology—even Anabaptist theology—is based on the experience of a particular community of believers, particularly of those in leadership.

I could give you several examples but one will do. Mennonite Brethren have always held to the teaching that only baptized members of the body of Christ could partake of communion. They insisted this was biblical. But with children today being nurtured into the faith rather than having a crisis conversion experience, this teaching is changing to allow children who claim to have had a saving experience of faith in Christ to partake in communion. Theology shifts to adjust to experience except when it involves women's calling to the ministry.

Hundreds, dare I say thousands of women, have felt called of God to a spiritual ministry. Are they all in error? Would God allow women to hold this

growing conviction, sometimes from childhood on, sometimes resulting in a highly fruitful ministry, only to hear at the judgment throne: “This was not for you. You were trespassing into forbidden territory”? Yet often they had to repress this sense of calling because the longstanding habits of the mind and rules of propriety that formed their consciousness led them into conflict with themselves, and also with other women as well as church leaders. Sometimes even with God.

Letty Russell in *The Household of Freedom* states that welcoming a new group into a household causes a major shift in the way the members of that household see reality. Everyone has to adjust when power is redistributed, when Jane moves out of traditional roles and becomes a theologian. This happens when a baby is born into the family or when the family takes on a hired man. The admission of the Gentiles to the Gospel certainly caused an upheaval in the New Testament church with an ongoing conflict between the Judaizers and the Gentile Christians.

As more women are admitted to both the official and unofficial body of Mennonite theologians, which of course means the preaching ministry, their presence will cause an upheaval in weak and, in some congregations, often nonexistent hermeneutical communities, but it will give us a more “enGendered” story. The gender gap closes when women become theologians and do not have to receive their church polity secondhand.

2. The gap between the genders was sustained because men had control of the public record of the Mennonite community. In other words, they were the historians. What factors contributed to women’s official exclusion from history? One main reason is that archival material in historical libraries was not usually neatly catalogued under women’s history, nor did researchers expect to find significant historical material under women’s names when they did locate them.

Secondly, little in a historian’s professional training equipped him (and most historians were men in earlier times) to make sense of the lives of ordinary and powerless persons, particularly women, who were not part of the public record or who didn’t openly influence church policies. Historians still look for the record of the influence of exceptional and powerful people in official minutes of public meetings, public debates, speeches, letters, and journals.

The life stories of ordinary people, especially women, who go about their daily tasks quietly and who do not see themselves as makers of history do not usually provide the material for history books. Historians judged women by how far they ventured into the men’s zone of power instead of moving into the women’s world and recognizing them as people who also had a history and influenced the history of the church, but in a different way—through family relations, church associations, reproduction, domesticity.

Did Mennonite leaders do other things besides discuss theology and church politics, draft statements, plan budgets and projects that promoted missions? Did they marry? I read all the autobiographies I am aware of about Mennonite

leaders, and most of them are men at this date. In some of these writings, wives are hardly mentioned. And I mourn for the women who stood beside their husbands through all kinds of successes and difficulties and are not considered worthy of a few lines in their husband's autobiography.

Since the underside of the Mennonite story was not part of the public record, historians shoved women to the edge of the history they were writing. This was done in various ways. Indexes and official records omitted them. These omissions made them invisible to future generations. After I had presented a paper at a Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies study conference here in Winnipeg in 1986, in which I included data about the representation of women as delegates to the Canadian M.B. Conferences, a registrant from Saskatchewan told me after a session that my figures were wrong with regard to the number of female delegates present at one of the 1960s Canadian M.B. Conferences. I had the number as zero. He said a woman from Saskatchewan came as a delegate that year but was not counted at the request of the conference executive committee. My count should have been one woman for that year. The matter had troubled him all these years. Finally he had been able to confess this withdrawal of her name to someone and clear his conscience. How many other such incidents are unrecorded?

The indexes of *The Mennonite Experience in America* series reveal the invisibility of women in Mennonite life, especially the first and last volumes. Admittedly women are hard to find if their accomplishments are evaluated by the extent to which they provide women with the trappings and appearance of traditional power. In the first and second volumes Mennonite historians were still not at the stage of seeing women as an integral part of our history. In Volume 3 the women's role or contribution is pieced in. Obviously historian James Juhnke knew he had a task to accomplish or he would be in trouble, but in Volume 4, which is somewhat more ideological in nature, the women's voice is practically missing.

In the first volume I found 5 women's names indexed. I didn't expect many more from a period in which women were not part of our historical consciousness. In the second I found 18 names, and in the third 53. The fourth had only 15 or 16, just a few more than the number of women the apostle Paul sends greetings to in the Roman church. Paul worked in Rome several years; Volume 4 covers forty years. Counting names may not be an entirely fair assessment, but it does say something.

I took a closer look at the way women's names were mentioned both in the text and index. I have done enough research to know how difficult it is to find women's names, particularly given and maiden names. I recall attending a committee meeting at which a woman's name came up for nomination for some position. One rather rigid pastor kept asking, "But who is her husband?" He could not identify her without her husband. Yet for decades Mennonite women have been identified only by their husband's name. And their own identity has been lost.

In the first volume most often the names of only male heads of families are mentioned. The husband's name with the words "and family" also occurs. The wife's given name is not mentioned. A younger woman sometimes is identified only as Rittenhouse's daughter, not by her own name. Sometimes the husband's name is mentioned as "John Roads and his wife and six children." I noticed references to Mr. and Mrs. Martin Kolb, no wife's name. Only in the last few decades were the given names of both husband and wife mentioned, rather than being listed as, for example, Mr. and Mrs. John Janzen.

Food has been the popular carrier of Mennonite culture and continues to be so. I was looking at a Mennonite cookbook that came out of Steinbach several decades ago. I like to use it. The women were there, comfortably entrenched in their roles, cooking, baking and publishing cookbooks to raise money for mission causes. But they were made invisible behind their husband's names. The recipes were signed Mrs. John Reimer, Mrs. Henry Thiessen and so forth.

I believe one of the future records of the Mennonite history will be our cookbooks for they reveal the degree of acculturation to the dominant culture. I have about 20 such cookbooks and have reviewed some for various publications. A study of the development of Mennonite cookbooks could prove interesting. Why are some no different than a Betty Crocker Cookbook? Yet why are they still called Mennonite cookbooks? Which Mennonite church histories still include a section on Mennonite food?

At the Hillsboro Mennonite Brethren Church hangs a roster of all the couples in the church who have celebrated their golden wedding anniversary—a significant event in a day when marriages shatter like crystal thrown against the wall. Yet when I studied this list I found that until the recent decades women were invisible. The names were listed as Mrs. and Mrs. John Penner, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Esau, and so forth.

Yet women were part of migrations, of home and church life. In Volume 4 of *The Mennonite Experience in America* their voice as individuals almost disappears at a time when they were beginning to have a voice in affairs. I agree with Frieda Esau Klippenstein's comment about Ted Regehr's *Mennonites in Canada 1939-70* that it is difficult to include women's stories (the underside) in spheres from which they were actually systematically excluded. It comes across as pinned on, incomplete. A separate chapter about women seems contrived. So I suggest we need a new way of writing history. We need to ask new questions and find a new way of writing history so that public and private areas of life together form the basis of our story.

To keep closing this gap, it will mean all historians will have to shift their focus from the public church record to studying wills, marriage certificates, church records, census reports, tax lists, birth rates, family life, memoirs and journals, genealogies and land records—yes even cookbooks and quilts to get at the history behind the history.

3. The gap was there because men's and women's social roles were well defined in earlier years. The public and private realms were kept separate. My

father was a young apprentice clerk in a store in the Ukraine. When business was slow in the store, the young clerk was used for other work, to his distress. The storeowner's stout wife found pushing her two toddlers in the baby carriage difficult, yet she loved to visit her friends and drink coffee with them in the afternoon. She persuaded her husband to let his fifteen-year-old clerk push the carriage down the main street to her destination and then come back for her in about an hour's time.

The route of the procession led past the schoolyard where the children played outside. The woman strode ahead, while Dad followed far behind with the baby carriage. As soon as the school children spotted him, Dad was in for it. They teased him loudly the full length of the schoolyard for doing girls' work. He vowed never to push that carriage again, but didn't know how to get out of the job.

The next time he was conscripted for women's duty, in his haste to move past the schoolyard as quickly as possible, he wheeled the baby buggy too close to the sidewalk edge and the two toddlers tumbled out, howling worse than the wolves at the edge of a Siberian village in the dead of winter. To their screams their mother added her loud scolding at his clumsiness. She gathered the babies, put them in the buggy and wheeled it home herself, which suited him just fine. She never asked for his help again to do women's work. (This incident is described in my recently published book, *The Storekeeper's Daughter: A Memoir*).

Historically, women were never the ones to introduce theological positions but were expected to be the standardbearers of the positions held by the larger church body, especially cultural traditions and social roles. Long after men had moved in other directions, women were expected to be the social conservators of Mennonite culture, presumably based on Scripture, particularly clothing and hairstyles. Clothing restrictions were never as severe for men as for women. The Mennonite Tarzan soon put on a suit with lapels and wore a tie. By their headcoverings, long hair, simple dress styles, worn long after men accepted current hairstyles and dress, Mennonite Janes were expected to reinforce women's traditional role of submission, modesty, and piety. It was important to keep gender hierarchy clear.

The Mennonite position on women's clothing was based on biblical prescriptions as interpreted by men. Women were held responsible to hold modernity at bay. In Germany, among the Umsiedler, I noticed that the young women were expected to wear long hair, long skirts, and coverings while the young men very soon got European haircuts and wore European clothing. Though the church may have taught servanthood for all, women became the visible symbols of this servant theology in their daily lives at home and church. Only now are women becoming freer in talking and writing about their feelings, about being forced to carry traditions in which they had no say.

Clearly, strong male leaders and theologians have determined thinking regarding men's roles and women's roles in church life. For example, the highly respected Mennonite Brethren preacher H.H. Janzen writes in *The Seven*

Churches: Brief Outlines for Study of Revelation 2&3, that Paul had his definite reasons for not permitting a woman to teach. “A woman [teaching] within the church is most dangerous. First, women are more open to emotional influences. Emotions have a very little part, rather, none in biblical teaching. Secondly, wherever a woman teaches, especially a mixed audience, she must be aware of the fact that she carries with her the so-called sexual appeal, which will, whether we admit it or not, influence, to a certain extent, those who listen.” Did Mennonite Tarzans never have any “so-called sexual appeal”? Such influential preachers affected popular thinking about women’s roles in the church and kept us from having an “enGendered” history.

4. Another strong factor that has kept women out of our historical consciousness has to do with the peace position, formerly referred to as nonresistance. A strong teaching in the early Mennonite church in Russia was nonresistance. This issue of nonresistance concerned primarily the sons in the family, not the daughters. Adherence to this position determined whether or not the young men were drafted, and if they were, what type of service they would do in the military. Mennonite histories record fathers’ concerns for sons who might have to enter the army in Russia. Several Mennonite migrations occurred because of this concern for sons’ welfare. Women—their needs and their role in relationship to conscription—were not part of this major concern. They went along in the migrations because men made the decisions.

What were women thinking when the discussion was about sons and conscription? How was nonresistance taught in the home? Or was it? Was it something assumed? Because the destiny of the Mennonites was wrapped up with the way sons were involved in the matter of resistance to war and not the way women experienced the truth of Scripture in relationship to it, women’s thinking was not viewed as significant.

5. Biology, including human sexuality, has also played a part in keeping the genders apart even as it drew them together. Whoever controls reproduction determines the woman’s role in society and the church. The acceptance of family planning by Mennonites changed the Mennonite world. When birth control was taken out of the sin category and placed into an acceptable category of behavior, things changed.

I read recently *The Blumstein Legacy* by Leland Harder and Samuel Harder. The book traces the history of the Harder family through six generations beginning in Prussia and ending up in Canada, the United States, and Paraguay. It reinforced for me once again that the early absence of birth control influenced women’s roles and Mennonite theology more than we realize. With marriage women faced pregnancy after pregnancy and the threat of death at childbirth and disease. My mother told me that women bought dresses at the time of marriage that would accommodate future pregnancies and the nursing of children. Today men marry a new “trophy” wife when the former one is no longer useful. Then a man married a new wife as each one died, often in childbirth or from complications of many pregnancies. Some men sired anywhere from eight to 18 children.

Did anyone ever complain? I can only speak for the under-the-breath mutterings I hear even now when the number of children one woman bears seems too many.

Even during the most difficult war years after World Wars I and II, my reading shows me that women kept having baby after baby even in the face of great famine, migration, exile, imprisonment, and death. Was abstinence in marriage ever a consideration out of concern for the mother? The identity of women as child-bearers was rooted in their anatomy. They migrated long distances big with child. It was their duty. It was their lot in life.

The introduction of birth control changed women's role in society but it also changed Mennonite history and theology. How? When women gained control of their reproductive functions, that control changed their lives, that of their husbands, and the church. For one thing the church now had to be concerned about membership growth of the church other than through biological growth. As long as families were large, local church growth was not an issue. Economic growth was. Finding enough land for each son when he married was the overriding concern. In Russia the Mennonite communities expanded to daughter colonies because of the explosion of children. The same is true today of the Amish and Hutterites.

The big issue for Mennonites in Russia was finding more and more land, rather than growing larger congregations. Small families would have kept membership roles at a stable or declining level in Russia and also in this country in the early years. Strong biological church growth kept the body expanding. Large families even here in Canada kept Mennonites on the land; smaller families allowed them to move to the cities and become urbanized. A father with a wife and ten or twelve children did not readily move to the city. Only the older children moved away to find work there. Human sexuality had a great deal to do with the development of the Mennonite body politic.

This long process of bringing both genders into the Mennonite story forces me to ask a few questions:

1. Why didn't we have more fun along the way as we looked for a truer history? But then, of course, history was supposed to be strait-laced, factual—without a heart. I sense the humor now in incidents that happened a long time ago, but I didn't then. Then it was serious stuff. Heart-breaking stuff.

During the fourteen years I wrote a column of Mennonite humor for *The Festival Quarterly*, I soon discovered that much of our humor comes at the expense of the most powerful among us—the Tarzans—the preachers and leaders. There is always an attempt to find the Achilles heel, to burst the bubble of pomposity associated with authority. Very little humor exists about women and their roles or even about the relationship of men and women, other than husband and wife, and there again it is at the expense of the more dominant member of the two—usually the husband.

Coming as we do from a long line of protesters, (we started out being against something) the poet/prophet and the humorist are not always welcome. I can hardly imagine an early Anabaptist standing with feet far apart, head thrown back and laughing at the goodness of the world. Historians have traditionally looked for the theological positions that have been won sometimes at great cost to the human spirit and body and constitutional changes processed.

More than four decades ago at the end of the daylong celebration of my husband's ordination to the ministry, I collected my children and headed home. Everyone said it had been a great day. As I took off my new black velvet hat that late afternoon, I noticed that the sweaty fingerprints of the visiting minister, who had laid his hands on my head in prayer, had left permanent indentations. Thereafter I wore the mark of ordination on my head, although I had made no public promises and received no formal blessing for my role as a minister's wife.

I told this story at the first Women Doing Theology conference in Kitchener a number of years ago and found to my amazement my audience of younger women was laughing. This was crying stuff! A permanent mark of ordination but no ordination. Then I realized I should have laughed at it all these years also — and not cried at the injustice of the event.

Cleaning out some files recently I came upon a piece I had written probably in the 1960s which I called "An Immodest Proposal". I don't think I ever tried to get it published. But it was serious angry stuff, as serious as Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal" for preventing the famine in Ireland by raising infants to two years and then killing them for food. I had written this before women were allowed to attend conferences as delegates, so I proposed that they attend but in a different capacity — that of official cheering section, with special seats to the rear so as not to distract the male delegates. Because conventions have their discouraging moments, these women would lift spirits with an occasional cheer routine and pompom waving. They would serve coffee during the sessions, take telephone messages, pin on identification badges, hand out aspirins and ballots and official documents, count ballots, even sing a few songs now and then.

For those men who feared bringing women to the conference would defeminize the women— make them less tender, less sensitive, perhaps even less human if they became aware of bureaucracies and money problems, in recognition of women's more delicate nature all women would be asked to leave the convention hall when the deeper, more serious issues like balancing the budget or discussing the Sunday school attendance record came before the delegation. In deference to those who felt that the presence of women at church-policy making meetings might introduce error into the church, even as Eve did in the Garden of Eden, and also in deference to those who were horrified at the thought of women hearing and not fully understanding and then becoming over-enthused about what they could not grasp, the doors to all committee rooms would be provided with special padlocks and the men advised to speak softly and in plain terms when women were around, avoiding all theological jargon. At that time I wrote not with humor but with harsh satire and bitterness in my soul at being excluded.

This summer a friend told me a story about myself which I had never heard. Dottie Janzen, a local pastor in the Hillsboro General Conference Mennonite church, had been invited to do a series of midweek Bible studies at the Ebenfeld Mennonite Brethren Church. In the intervening weeks, she and I were both on the planning committee for a Women in Ministry conference. After the conference I wrote a short article about it for *The Christian Leader*, the Mennonite Brethren church periodical, in which I mentioned her name. Shortly thereafter, the Ebenfeld pastor canceled her invitation because of her association with me. I didn't know this until this June at the Women Doing Theology conference in North Newton. I'm glad she never told me at the time because I would have been furious. Now I can laugh. "What fools we mortals be."

2. Why has so much happened by default, not by decision? As a faith community why has the church been unwilling to take faith risks even after a position had been biblically proven? Though our history books are filled with decisions made by large and small bodies, many more decisions were determined by default. A process of slow theological evolution took place rather than action based on group decision.

3. Why have we been so task-oriented, concerned about keeping people, particularly women, in their traditional roles, and given so little time to the voice of the poet as prophet? Why has the language of metaphor and symbol been suspect? We have swept aside the language of the poet and celebrant. We have also neglected the voice of the psalmist—the voice of confession and restoration of God's grace and forgiveness. After reading some histories I've told myself that this is not the whole story. Parts of the story have been submerged. I was helping A.E. Janzen, missions leader among the Mennonite Brethren, edit his memoirs. He wrote one draft, but by the time I saw it again he had cut huge portions which told another side of the Tabor College story. I couldn't persuade him to leave it in.

Historians tell us they work only with facts. They take note of red-letter days and of discrepancies. Delbert Wiens of Fresno writes: "[Historians] are more at home with established certainties than with the uncharted regions of the soul." They are attracted to codified statements, not to living experience, not to story, whether praiseworthy or difficult. They are looking for the data to prove something.

At a recent Churches United for Peacemaking conference, a long-time pastor said she found that women were the best historians. They kept telling and retelling their story over and over again in her office. Women don't have the same urgency to move past the story, she said. Yet, as one attender pointed out, women keep retelling their story because they have carried the burden of their suffering for a long time. They chronicle emotions and relationships rather than facts, and until someone says, "I hear your story," they cannot move ahead.

The theologians, on the other hand, know they can hear God speaking. Yet how different it might have been if poet and the prophet/psalmist had been allowed to speak for God to illuminate our humanity with evidence of grace.

We easily forget. Novelist Gabriel Marquez writes in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* about a village in which the people suffer from the disease of forgetting. They forget everything and anything. So a young man posts a sign at the entrance to the village that states two things. It gives the name of the village and the words: “There is a God.” If the villagers should forget either they would not survive.

Our historians long ago raised a sign at the entrance to our Mennonite village that says its name. We are Mennonites. Every conference such as this makes the letters on the sign even bolder and bigger. A visit to any of our historical libraries reasserts this name through their thousands of historical books, documents, pamphlets, and archival material. The name of our village is important to us.

But let’s not forget that other word on that sign at the entrance to the village: “There is a God.” We can get so wrapped up in the historical, theological and sociological aspects of our village, we forget that reason the first Anabaptists took the Reform movement even further. They did so because of their belief in a redeeming God.

Let’s not forget the community of which we are a part. Our fellow pilgrims on this journey include both women and men.

Let’s not forget there is a God. God began this community and will continue to work through both men and women. May the story of both be told. May it be an “enGendered” story.