

my friends Intotemak

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What is this Place? Finding God's Kingdom in the Soil

The following reflection on land and life together is taken from a wonderful sermon that Kenton Lobe preached at Fort Garry Mennonite, in Treaty 1 Territory. Lobe's piece takes the place of our usual editorial because it nicely captures the themes of this edition of Intotemak – learning the stories of land, of one another, and allowing those stories to shape (and even scar) our personal and collective identities. Blessings as you read and wrestle, as you watch and pray.

What is this place where we find ourselves, and what does this have to do with being the church? We are located here in the Red River watershed just a mile or so west of the Red. The river was the route by which many Mennonites arrived here, in the fledgling province of Manitoba. Those of us who arrived in the 19th century from Russia, likely disembarked from steam boats that travelled up and down the Red River from the United States. At one of these landing sites close to Niverville, Mennonites were welcomed by members of the Metis community who loaded our trunks and worldly belongings onto their Red River carts and transported us to the immigration sheds that were our interim homes before moving onto the East Reserve.

This story was told to me by a Metis friend I have been working with at the Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) Farm.

Caroline Chartrand calls herself a Landless Metis Seedsaver and her life's work is to collect the seeds used by her people in the 18th century. This of course opens many potentially compelling questions on the politics of seeds, corporate concentration in the seed sector, and agricultural biodiversity as many seeds are quickly becoming extinct. However, in the process of growing out some of these seeds with her and establishing an Indigenous led seed library at the Mennonite Heritage Centre, we have also started to exchange stories and histories. Part of the history of the Metis people of course predates the Mennonite arrival here in the newly formed province of Manitoba in the early 1870s.

Prior to the land grant to the Mennonites, the Manitoba government had promised 1.4 million acres of land to the Metis as a settlement from the many years of conflict as the prairies were settled, first by trading companies (Fort Garry) and then by farmers who were brought in to make the prairies bloom and to consolidate control over contested land. Donovan Giesbrecht, a former student of Royden Loewen at the University of Winnipeg, carefully researched this contestation right on the East Reserve in what is now the village of Kleefeld. It turns out that there were a number of Metis families who, for thirty years, challenged the gift of their homesteads to the Mennonites – this is but one example

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Intotemak translates as my clan and are people who walk in solidarity. *Intotemak* is a quarterly "zine," published by Mennonite Church Canada Witness.

of the dispossession that occurred as we came into this place. In March of last year, following a thirty year legal battle with the government of Manitoba that finally ended up going to the Supreme Court of Canada, the Metis won a unanimous ruling from the judges there, upholding their land claim and confirming that the story of Kleeefeld was a part of a much larger story of dispossession. As Caroline told this story at the CMU Farm, we stood on land less than one mile south of the Assiniboine River, land that was likely a Metis river lot farm prior to the 1870s.

What is this place? Where is God in this?

One of the seeds that Caroline shared with us came from White Earth Indian Reservation, about four hours south of here. It was a squash seed – a squash that is so old that



it pre-dates contact – and Caroline was helping us to develop a hand pollinating methodology that we could use to ensure that the *Gete Okosomin* squash wouldn't cross with the other pumpkins and squashes that we had growing at the CMU farm. Her constant encouragement to us as we were learning was to get close, look carefully and become familiar with this plant that yielded squash that were almost three feet in length! She would refer to these squash as her sisters, in keeping with many indigenous traditions that understand both human and non-human life as a part of "all my relations". This of course sounded very strange to my Eurocentric ears, but became less so as I patiently cared for the plants, hand pollinated the female flowers, and sat with the squash on the shelf of my office and dining room for much of the winter.

Here, in this place, we are reminded that to locate oneself, to become aware of the richness of local context, and to care for land and for all our relations is not peripheral to the gospel but part of the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God that Jesus spoke about. It is the good work that we are called to while we await Jesus' return. That we have largely forgotten this is perhaps not surprising, given our distance from the land and from those who are disapproved of by "proper society".

Perhaps the caring fidelity that so helpfully names the character of God in the Psalms is also a lesson for us as we wait and as we witness. Perhaps witnessing to the truth of Christ is about orienting our gaze to those around us and to the land which sustains us. Perhaps it is not simply about the going up, but about bringing God's kingdom down, all the way to the people and places right outside our door, all the way to the soil of our gardens.

Kenton Lobe,
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**VISION HEALING
& HOPE**

God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace, so that God's healing and hope flow through us to the world.



Tower of Babel

Babel Revisited: A Prayer against Petropolis

This past October, Steve Heinrichs was invited to speak at “Where the Waters Meet”, an Indigenous-settler conversation hosted by Augustine United Church (Winnipeg, MB) exploring how diverse peoples can come together to address our ecological crisis. Steve was asked to describe the predicament we find ourselves in. He decided to dust off an ancient Scripture tale to do so.

I have a story, an old Bible story made foolishly new. Some think it’s a myth, some think a legend. And so they don’t take it seriously. Don’t want to. ‘Cause if you take this tale to heart and bones, well, that’ll change you. Change everything. It might even cost you and cost everyone. Many of you know that. But for those of you who don’t – be warned. It’s the damned truth. And this truth might set you free, but it might also paralyze, it might terrorize, it might even crucify.

Yeah, extreme poetics are necessary in this story, but this is not hyperbole. This is the honest-to-God-goods. So you must decide. You can shut your soul tight and save yourselves from hurt. Or you can open it in weakness and enter the nightmare – the death-groans of mother earth. I fear the results – you should too – but we

know the Spirit’s call – we can’t just listen, we must choose. For right now, the cloud of witnesses are watching – the winged and two-legged saints! Right now, the witnesses of the earth – the four-legged of the land, the fish of the waters – they are calling. And heaven – it waits, pregnant with hope.

(Bell rings)

Our story comes from the Middle East – great Babylon – and it comes from here: colonial Canada, the Petropolis state. The story goes back to the near beginnings, to the Genesis gone amuck. And it goes something like this.

Chapter 11. Verse 1

At one time all the people of the world spoke the same language and used the same words.

Let’s check that: not all the people, but mainly the wealthy and the white people.

Those folks and the many they co-opted spoke the same imperial language and employed the same deadly logics – powerful words like capital, progress, property, stocks and bonds; powerful ideas like “free markets,” “human resources,” “natural resources,” “bang for the buck,” “secure energy,” “collateral damage,” “freedom of choice,” “freedom 55,” “all you can eat,” “all you can wear,” “all you can watch,” any-time, all the time, anywhere.

Now these people were often on the move, looking to the east, to the south, and to the west – trying to secure their well-being by securing more lands, more waters, more jobs and more peoples. And they were highly successful at that.

Of course, these settlers weren’t all bad. There was beauty, creativity and goodness in them. And in their mix there were those



who questioned the ways of their society. But in the main, these settlers were an insanely voracious lot – a people who devoured more than they needed and as much as they could get away with.

Verse 2

One day, they “discovered” a valley in the land of Shinar and settled there.

Shinar is actually the prairies of Turtle Island. It wasn't in need of discovering. People had been there forever. But the settlers didn't care. They pushed them aside and said to each other, “The flesh of this earth woman is laying waste. Let us rip her up and build fields and farms for ourselves, megafarms 6 by 6 by 6 million acres wide, load them with pesticides and potash, and exhaust a harvest for the cities we are building for ourselves.” And they did it. For themselves.

And then they discovered a network of raging rivers in Turtle Island and said to each other, “The veins of this earth woman aren't being used to full potential. Let us damn them up, every one, so that we can harness her energy, and build a city for ourselves.” And they did it. For themselves.

And then they discovered the boreal forest in Turtle Island, and said to each other, “We must bind this place to our service. Let us remove everything above ground and fire water as hot as hell into the groin of this earth woman; let us get her blood-black gold so we can build cities, banks and storehouses for ourselves.” And they did it. For themselves.

Verse 5

So the settlers of Babel built a city and a tower. It almost reached heaven. It made them famous.

And the corporations and her nation-state were proud. And the military stood on guard to protect it and to ensure the intake of civilized resources from uncivilized places. Many of the people were content. Many loved the dream they were living. Many were too distracted by the local sports teams and the latest technologies, to question the whole set-up. And some were too beat down by life – understandably so – to think beyond their lives.

But others – they were able. They



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Petropolis - The tar sands of Alberta are as large as the country of England.

knew this wasn't working and wouldn't last. They knew something was desperately wrong. The natives were the first. Living in the ghettos, forced away from traditional lands and practices by the violence of progress, they knew that the city's wealth was their poverty. They had been made a national sacrifice “for the greater industrial good.” And soon, there were settlers who were coming to know it too... shaken by the shouts of host peoples, reading the apocalyptic signs of the times...they joined with the Indigenous and – **as Verses 6 to 7 should read** – prayed for the Creator to come down.

“Manitou – won't you pity us! God – save us! The powers are united; they're speaking the same language. Can you see what they've done?”

Fact – Before the Industrial Revolution, the density of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere – the key cause of global warming – was about 280 parts per million. Today, it has reached 400 parts – far above what's needed to keep warming at 2 degrees – and it's still rising...the fastest rise in temperature in the last 10 000 years.

And the people cried – “God damn it!”

Fact – Developed countries, which

represent less than twenty percent of the world's population, have emitted almost 75 percent of all greenhouse gas pollution that is now destabilizing the climate.

And the people cried – “God damn it!”

Fact - Burn all the oil in Alberta's Tar Sands – the largest industrial project in human history – and we are up to 540 parts per million. Game over planet earth.

And the people cried – “God damn it!”

Fact - The current rate of species extinction is an astonishing 100 to 1000 times greater than the average extinction rates ever. Our culture will destroy one-third to one-half of the planet's species in the next generation. It is the slaughter of the innocents.

And the people cried – “God damn it!”

Fact - Warmer seawater has reduced phytoplankton, the base of the marine food chain, by forty percent since 1950. Warmer seawater and industrial fishing has reduced the amount of fish in the water by 90% since 1850.

And the people cried – “God damn it!”

Fact - There are currently 2300 coal-fired power stations. The nations are planning to add 2000 more in the next ten years. Annual coal exports from Australia, Indonesia, Canada and other rebellious



Indigenous peoples cry out to the nations at the UN COP 20 Climate Action gathering in Lima, Peru (December 9, 2015).



Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper

nations were about 2.1 million metric tons in 1990. In 2010 it was 176 million tons! If this quantity continues for just 10 years, it'll move the planet into an unstoppable warming event which will see temperatures rise in the next fifty years between three to six degrees. If the world is 4 degrees warmer, conservative institutions predict that three-quarters of the earth's land area will be unsustainable for food growing or human settlement, including most of Africa, Asia and the Americas.

And the people cried – “God damn it!”

Fact – The Canadian Government's response to this ecological crisis? Champion fossil-fuel production by expanding the tar sands, advocate more pipelines, deregulate environmental protections, dismiss Treaty rights, and whore itself to the economic gods of capitalism.

And the people cried – “God damn it!”

God damn it indeed.

This is – as Bill McKibben, Methodist Sunday School teacher and leading environmentalist says – “mucked up – and demands our moral outrage. The powers are in revolt. They don't want to change their ways. Quote – “No country will take action on climate change that will hurt its economy” (Stephen Harper, June 2014).

(Bell rings)

In the old story, the Spirit of Yahweh scatters the settler powers all over the world. In an act of divine grace, the building of that violent city is stopped. We are not there yet. Petropolis is growing rapaciously – and indigenous lands and lifeforms are suffering inordinately because of it. The powers want to scale the heavens. They want to be gods. And as the Scripture says, “unless they are stopped, nothing is impossible for them.”

Meanwhile, a growing number are coming together. They, and we, are watching, talking, strategizing. Hoping against hope, we ponder acts of resistance and survival.

And we pray: “Come, Lord! Come Manitou! Scatter the foolishness and dismantle the industrial idols with your loving anger. And do it soon.”

Steve Heinrichs, Director of Indigenous Relations, Mennonite Church Canada



Looking for Spirit in Each Other



Adrian Jacobs



Michael Champagne



Norm Voth

Sometimes God's Spirit interrupts a meeting with dramatic moments of holy discomfort. I experienced such moments at the 2014 Fall Partnership Circle meeting held at Circle of Life Thunderbird House on November 1. Every year Mennonite Church Manitoba and Mennonite Church Canada gather participants for a day of celebration, planning and eating together. It is good to come together as friends in this way. This year we explored "How Will We Walk Together?" with two guests, Adrian Jacobs and Michael Champagne, providing input and challenges.

Adrian is the Keeper of the Circle at Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre, a community that integrates traditional Indigenous spirituality and Christian theology. A prophetic voice, Adrian calls us to partnerships that humbly seek to listen and understand. He reminded us that for millennia western European Christians took on the role of theological gatekeepers. Furthermore, we tied our understanding of scripture to the dominant political systems.

I've often felt that, as Mennonites, we were above that accusation. With a few exceptions, we did not participate in the residential school system or other corporate attempts at assimilation. While we may not have been involved in such systemic oppression, we did, and continue to, benefit from the political policies that disenfranchised First Nations people. Adrian challenged us to see that all of us, First Nations and Settler peoples continue to live with the effects of a colonized gospel. We rejected traditional rituals and practices, thereby preventing First Nations from practicing their traditional spiritualities. Even when host peoples converted to Christianity, we settlers insisted that they practice it in European ways. We assumed that our European understandings of the scriptures were not coloured by culture. I am growing in my realization that partnerships will require hard work and a teachable spirit. I wonder if I am prepared to engage this challenging work.

Michael Champagne, a dynamic young First Nations leader, shared his own story of beating the odds and successfully completing high school. Not only did he graduate

high school, but he went on to found Aboriginal Youth Opportunities, an anti-violence youth movement in Winnipeg's North End. Michael is an inspiring and motivating leader who refuses to accept that *the world as it is*, is the only world possible. He challenged the gathering to trust young people to lead and to respect their insights, gifts, wisdom and passion.

For an opening to our gathering I chose to read the Genesis creation story because I assumed it would be a place of connection between us. Michael reacted to God's command that humanity rule over creation because it separates humans from the created world. He suggested we need to remember we are part of creation and not disconnected from it. Michael's reaction caused me to wonder whether reading the creation story through the lens of First Nations culture would provide corrective insights?

After his presentation, someone asked Michael what Christians should do about the biblical call to evangelism. It was a question I often wonder about, but never dared to ask. Michael's response grabbed my attention. He said that we should stop, and went on to say that evangelism needs to be living an exemplary life. He called on Christians to quit trying to convert people and respect all spirituality. If our actions invite conversation then engage that with respect and humility.

Both Adrian and Michael offered us a way to walk together humbly and with open hearts. Can we trust God's Spirit to guide our discernment, or will we begin with the assumption we are right and anything different is wrong? Can we look for Spirit in each other, even when we disagree?

I left the meeting with a holy discomfort, grateful for the gracious attitude modeled by our teachers. I pray for courage and patience to learn and to do the hard work of building true partnerships.

Norm Voth,

Director of Evangelism and Service Ministries, Mennonite Church Manitoba

Come Out My People!

A Decolonized Riff on the Moses Story



Chippewa woman with child (1900)

Years back, when the Queen in England was called Victoria Saxe-Coburg Gotha, a Cree couple gave birth to a son. He was a fine child, a delight to both of them. His mother kept him hidden, fearing that the RCMP would come to take him away to the residential school on the far side of the lake. One day they came in sight of the house. In fear of losing him, she strapped him in her papoose, and made for the lake. There, she wrapped him in a blanket and hid him among the wild rice, nestled in an old flour sack. She left his sister to watch over him until the RCMP left.

Meanwhile, the minister's daughter was passing in a canoe paddled by two of her father's house servants, Cree converts. She had her gun ready, on the lookout for waterfowl. She saw the sack hooked on a half-submerged beech tree, and heard the baby crying. She sent one of her bearers to bring it into the canoe and felt sorry when she saw the child. "This is one of the Indian babies" she said, wanting to keep him.

His sister called from the shore, and the bearer translated her question, "Shall I go and get one of the natives to nurse the baby for you?"

"Yes, go," she answered, so the girl got the baby's mother, and she became his nurse for the years of his infancy. When he was a little older, the minister's daughter came to fetch him to live with her family, and he was baptized Saxon, for as she said, "I found him in a sack, he is the sack's son."¹ He lived with them in the manse attached to the residential school, which the minister ran with an iron fist.

One day, after Saxon had grown older, he went out to the residential school's farm, where he witnessed a teacher savagely beat a young girl for speaking to her sister in Cree. He looked around, and waited until the teacher was alone, then killed him with a rock. He dragged the body into the bush and hid it there.

The next day, he went out and witnessed two boys his own age fighting over a hunk of bread. He asked the one grasping it, "Why are you beating another Indian?"

The boy replied, "Who do you think you are, a white man? Are you going to kill me too?" Then Saxon became afraid because he realized people knew what he had done.

When the minister learned of the missing teacher and heard the rumours that Saxon had been making trouble, he immediately sent for him. Saxon knew that more than one child had died as a result of this man's ministrations, so he fled the manse.

He escaped to an old campsite by Lake Midian. He heard shouting, and crept into the bush to witness a team of loggers bullying a group of sisters, who had been collecting firewood for their father's camp. He was a medicine-man they called Jethro. Saxon watched them harassing the women, and then burst out of his hiding place and attacked them until they fled.

Jethro invited Saxon to live with him and work on his trapline. Before long, he was married to one of the old man's daughters, and they had a son together.

In the years that followed, at the Residential School where Saxon had grown up, the old minister became obsessed with

¹ In the Bible, the name 'Moses' is described as a pun in Hebrew referencing the way he was drawn out of the water. But in Egyptian, Moses is a royal name – for example, as with Pharaoh Ramses; Ra-Moses. The Hebrew pun explanation is a way of 'reclaiming' Moses from the naming power of the royal court.



breaking the children, making them forget the families they had been stolen from. He became meaner than ever, and the children wept bitterly each night as he grew crueller, restricting rations and ordering beatings. They stifled their tears for fear of punishment, but Creator heard their silent sorrow and longing for a comforting mother.

Around this time, Saxon was out on the trapline, far from the campsite of his father-in-law Jethro. He smelt smoke, and went to investigate. He saw a bush fire, and turned to flee, but became lost and trapped, surrounded by the smoke and flames. But the place where he stood did not catch fire.

Surrounded by the fire, he heard a voice. "Saxon, remove your moccasins, for your Creator stands beside you!" Then the voice said "I am the one who has watched you since birth, who cared for your mother, and all her mothers before her. I know your father-in-law, I know this place, and I know you – what you have done, and what you will do."

Saxon was afraid, and hid his face, afraid that he would be punished for the murder he had committed. But the voice persisted. "I've heard the cries of your sisters and brothers, stolen and starved, forced to learn a strange language, taught to farm instead of fish, to fight instead of hunt, and repressed with cruelty and a wicked desire to make them into something that I did not create them to be. So here I am – to bring them out of that place and take them to a rich hunting ground, the place you were taken from, a place where many nations can cohabit. So, now, go! I'm sending you to the residential school to bring my people out!"

But Saxon shook his head. "Who do you think I am? A white man? To go and close the school, and bring all those children out? Where would I take them? What would I feed them? This trapline can't support more than my little family."

"I'll be with you. And you don't need to worry about those things. This land is a rich place. You've been taught to fear it, but my friend Jethro has been showing you about the good things all around. You are surrounded by life that will sustain you on your journey.

You're not a white man, and neither am I. You were raised to follow their ways, to live in their society – but only as an



"Moses & Pharaoh's daughter," by Konstantin Favitsky.

inferior, a servant, a child. They would never have accepted you. So you lashed out the only way you knew, responding with the same fear and violence you had seen all your life. But now, I have found you and I will teach you a new way, and go with you."

Questions:

1) In the Bible, the entry into the Promised Land is accomplished with genocidal violence, beginning with the 10 Plagues. 'Exodus' is liberation, but 'Eisodus' is conquest.

Is it inevitable that bloodshed follows liberation? If we didn't know the end of the story, would we assume from God's deal with Moses that the Israelites would conquer and dispossess the Canaanites and others living in the land?

2) Moses is thought to be an Egyptian royal name (part of names like 'Ramses'), but the Biblical text explains it as a Hebrew-language pun on how he was drawn from the waters. Naming the character 'Saxon' attempts to get at this same double-layered meaning.

How does this imposition of a name

enact imperial power? And does the pun-meaning recorded in the Bible reclaim that name for the oppressed Hebrews?

3) Women feature significantly in the Bible text, starting from the midwives' clever refusal to kill the male babies. How have these texts been misused to hide or diminish the role of women? What can that teach us about social models today?

Peter Haresnape,
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Struggling for the future of northern Manitoba and Saskatchewan

Traditional Values vs. the Nuclear Industry

In May 2011, Max Morin, a member of Canoe Lake First Nation and a former RCMP officer, was invited to a healing circle in Pinehouse, Saskatchewan to discuss prevention of youth suicides and reduction of addictions problems. Halfway through the meeting, one of the facilitators wrote “NMWO” and “duty to consult” on the flipchart. It became clear that NWMO stands for “Nuclear Waste Management

prospect of using it to bury highly toxic radioactive material feels like a personal assault.

It became clear that, after overtures from the NWMO, the village council had invited NWMO to consider Pinehouse as a possible site for a high level nuclear waste repository. The chief and council of English River First Nation had made a similar invitation (as did the leadership of

turned up at NWMO’s own information meetings to ask awkward questions. A number of people from southern Saskatchewan – including myself – came up to provide support at crucial times. Eventually, in December 2013, both communities were removed from NWMO’s list.

However, the *Committee for Future Generations* still had work to do. The two communities’ “collaboration agreements” with uranium mining corporations Cameco and Areva remain a major cause for concern. And it is not only the nuclear/uranium industry which is eyeing up traditional lands in the north – Calgary-based oil company Cenovus, seeking to extend its bitumen mining operations over the border from Alberta, has recently been fencing off land, preventing Denesuline trappers north of La Loche from reaching their traplines. In addition, the Committee and its allies suddenly realized in 2013 that NWMO had been moving rapidly in its dealings with the town of Creighton, located on the Manitoba border and effectively a suburb of Flin Flon. When Pinehouse and English River were eliminated from the process, Creighton was moved on to the next stage.

So for the last year, Committee activists from northwest and southern Saskatchewan have been making regular visits to Creighton to support the embattled opposition there. Creighton and Flin Flon are mining towns – the main employer is the Hudbay copper and zinc mine, and the population is mostly from the settler community. Opinion in both towns is split over nuclear waste – some see it as a means of diversifying the economy, others say they cannot see how water could be kept out of a waste repository. But some opponents are afraid to speak out, for fear of losing jobs or friends.

Significantly, though, Creighton’s potential site for a nuclear waste repository is actually outside the town boundaries, on Crown land in Treaty 10 territory. It is in the shared traditional territory of three



Organization” – storing Canada’s high-level nuclear waste repository was being presented as the solution to all of Pinehouse’s troubles through economic trickle-down. The healing circle had, in Max’s words, been “sabotaged”. Ten Pinehouse elders and several others, including Max, walked out. “The red flags went up right away,” he says.

So Max drove back to his home 100km away in Beauval, Saskatchewan. Meanwhile, fellow Beauval resident Debbie Mihalicz had set out to bring him some supplies. They met halfway. Debbie reports that on hearing the news she felt the earth move under her. For Debbie – and for many others throughout northern Saskatchewan – the emotional and spiritual connection to the earth is strong, and the

a number of Ontario towns and of Creighton, Saskatchewan).

Such proposals were totally at odds with the traditional values held by many people, from many spiritual traditions, in the north. So, in response, Max and Debbie, together with friends from Pinehouse, English River, Beauval, and other communities in the area, established the *Committee for Future Generations*. They petitioned for the prohibition of transport or storage of nuclear waste anywhere in the province: about 60% of Pinehouse’s electors signed. A majority of electors from English River ultimately also signed. In the summer of 2011, Committee organizers and supporters walked from Pinehouse to the Legislature building in Regina, 900km away. They organized information meetings, and

Many Christian communities have pensions and assets stored up in Socially Responsible Investments (SRI's). Surprisingly, many resource extraction companies, like Cenovus, are included in such SRI funds.

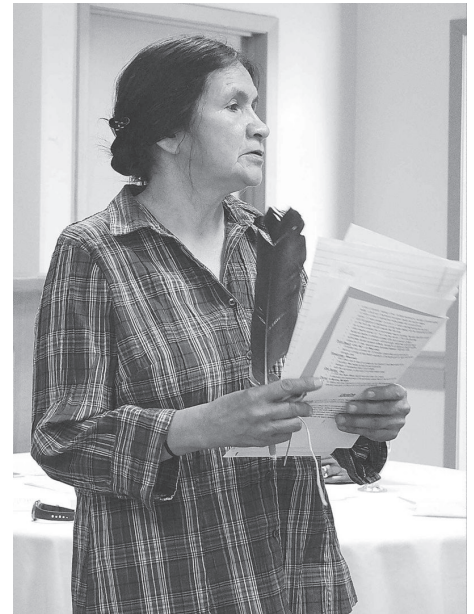
local First Nations – Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation (PBCN), Opaskwayak Cree Nation (OCN) and Mathias Colomb First Nation. Both PBCN and OCN have already passed band resolutions in total opposition to the storage of nuclear waste on their traditional territory. And yet NWMO repeatedly asserts, in its published literature and in the public statements of its representatives, that “the project will only proceed with the involvement of the interested community, Aboriginal communities and surrounding communities working together to implement it.” When questioned on this at a November 2014 meeting in Creighton, NWMO communications manager Mike Krizanc stated that they are in discussions with members of the local indigenous community. PBCN band councillor Eileen Linklater immediately pointed out that those members are in no way representative of community opinion, nor able to speak for the band. She later told me that she had, by chance, walked in on one such clandestine “discussion”, which immediately scattered on her arrival.

We do not know what NWMO is offering in meetings of this type. However, Freedom of Information requests by Regina-based Briarpatch magazine have yielded some insight into the nature of NWMO's relationship with those who were handling the nuclear waste agenda for the village of Pinehouse. Pinehouse's NWMO Community Liaison Committee chair, Vince Natomagan, appointed to the position by mayor Mike Natomagan, received substantial payments for his role in assisting the community to “learn more”. Travel and subsistence payments also came Natomagan's way, covering such things as spending time reading NWMO documents and writing a pro-NWMO op ed for a local newspaper under his own name.

It needs to be acknowledged that high-level nuclear waste exists and will need to be dealt with in the safest way possible. However, NWMO's deep geological repository concept has been subject to serious scientific challenge. For example, research conducted by chemist Prof. Gunnar Hultquist of Sweden's Royal Technical University indicates that the protective layer of copper around the used fuel rod bundles would need to be at least 1 meter thick (instead of 5cm) in order to prevent radioisotope leakage over the required 100 000 year timescale. Furthermore, at the November 2014 Creighton meeting, a NWMO engineer fully acknowledged a number of questions around transport safety which the organization has not yet investigated.

On matters like these (and there are several other areas of uncertainty), NWMO's science may in the end turn out to be right and its engineering design safe. Or it may not. The point is that the safety of the land, the water, the people and the whole ecosystem needs to be established with as much certainty as scientific method permits – and at present this is not the case. With key issues like these unresolved, it should be no surprise that articulate Indigenous peoples' voices - with a strong attachment to the land and a concern that it can continue to provide for future generations – are expressing skepticism. They need assurances which NWMO – like so many other extractive industries targeting the boreal regions – cannot give. Instead of being listened to and answered honestly, they are presented with promotional material and standard industry talking points (NWMO usually only sends out communications people, not engineers or scientists). Skepticism soon turns to total opposition. When they see one or two of their neighbours propagating the industry message for personal gain, opposition turns to anger at what is being done to their community.

Groups like the *Committee for Future Generations*, and bands like Peter Ballantyne First Nation, are poorly resourced. They cannot conceivably compete with the financial clout of NWMO or Cenovus or Cameco. But their courage and determination still gets results. As is so often the case worldwide, it is these Indigenous



PBCN band councillor Eileen Linklater

people who are on the front line, protecting us all from potentially unwise – maybe potentially disastrous - decisions by industrial interests who are always in a hurry.

What keeps them going? No doubt their determination is driven in large part by sheer survival instinct. But also in play is a deep spiritual sense of relationship, even oneness, with the rest of creation. Some identify as “traditional”, others as Christian (in a wide range of traditions from Catholic to Pentecostal), some aren't quite sure what they believe, but all work out of a deep understanding that our relationship with the Creator is deeply connected to our relationship with the creation. I think the Creator honours that.

*Mark Bigland-Pritchard,
Osler Mennonite Church, Osler, Sask.*



Growing in Our Awareness

Reflection on a First Nations Seminar

When Gerald Gerbrandt first contacted us to teach a course this fall in Canadian Mennonite University's new "Xplore: 55-Plus Enrichment Program," we were a bit overwhelmed. Our topic: "First Nations: Past and Present". Our challenge: where to even begin to touch the surface in only six, one-hour class sessions!

It was quickly apparent that our thirteen students were "keeners." Each class hour went by too fast and could have continued longer. The participants chose this class because they had many questions and wanted to both learn about Indigenous-settler realities and how we can grow in respectful relationship.

Each class began with a welcome to Treaty 1 territory – a concrete reminder that non-Native peoples are guests on this land, something that was a new thought for most of the group. Reading a prayer from an Indigenous person at the beginning of each session was also important to honour and model the way most Indigenous gatherings are opened.

We chose to focus on five main themes, one per week, and offer the class resources to continue their learning in these areas and beyond.

At our first class we discovered that the majority of participants had grown up with very stereotypical, mostly negative, views of host peoples – views absorbed from their community's opinions and from print and television media. Our challenge was to share another narrative... a more faithful and honest account of Indigenous – settler relationships.

Class two featured a quiz using statistics on Indigenous reality in Canada, and Manitoba more specifically, and went on to begin de-bunking some of the common myths that society has (for example, the idea that a university education is free for all First Nations students).

We were privileged to have Commissioner James Wilson of the Treaty Relations Office of Manitoba (TRCM) speak at our third class. Over the last number of years, the TRCM has promoted the phrase, "We Are All Treaty People," on Winnipeg buses and other public venues. The idea came to life as Wilson explained what treaties are and what difference they make for every person in Manitoba today. That was key; treaties aren't just about Indigenous peoples. Non-Natives are Treaty people too, and the treaties are critical as we seek to live together with respect and understanding. There was much appreciation expressed for Wilson's helpful descriptions and personable way of presenting such weighty material from both Indigenous legal/government perspectives and Canadian.

The fourth class was spent exploring several Indigenous cultural values. Our opening prayer was the seven directional Prayer of Thanks used each Sunday morning in the Riverton Fellowship Circle congregation north of Winnipeg. Then we encouraged the class to re-imagine how they look at a tipi - it is not just a unique tent. Their eyes were opened as we shared the rich meanings (passed on to us) that tipis hold (for example, each pole carries a teaching). The basics of the



Neill and Edith von Gunten

medicine wheel and the purpose of the sweat lodge more than filled the rest of the hour.

Our guest at the fifth class was Thelma Meade, an elder living in Winnipeg and a member of the Hollow Water First Nation along the eastern shore of Lake Winnipeg. Thelma shared of growing up in a loving family on an isolated reserve and attending a church run day school in her community before going to residential school. Later several students shared that they had not stopped to realize that even those who were not sexually or physically abused still needed counselling to heal from what they saw happening to others and from their own traumatic experiences, including being away from their families for long periods of time.

Another new thought for class members was when Thelma said that it was colonization and church denominations that made Native spirituality a "religion" (in European terms), and, as a result, denounced it. In fact, what is called Native spirituality is really a way of life, the values her Ojibwe people live by.

The focus of the sixth class was today's opportunities and needs; specifically, what can each of us do with the knowledge that we gained over these six weeks. Steve Heinrichs, Director of Indigenous Relations for Mennonite Church Canada, attended this class and encouraged participants to engage local stories, peoples and places. He shared the little-known story of how Winnipeg's water supply is drawn from Shoal Lake at the expense of the Shoal Lake First Nation that straddles the Ontario/Manitoba border. There was much surprise as people watched Steve's video and heard what he had learned on a trip to visit the community at Shoal Lake. The big question for us was, "Now that we know, how shall we Winnipeggers live?"

The class members shared that classes such as this need to continue for people that are searching so that they can move forward on their journey of learning and understanding. Also, they expressed a desire for concrete opportunities of engagement and advocacy. Hopefully class members will begin to participate in the many Indigenous led gatherings that take place throughout Treaty 1, finding ways to build solid, respectful relationships of sharing and learning.

Neill and Edith von Gunten, Winnipeg, Man.



A delegation of settlers visits Shoal Lake to learn their story.

Living in Winnipeg, clean and cheap water is easy to take for granted. When I use it, there is little that really compels me to reflect on where it came from and on how it ended up available for my use. It is only recently that I learned how on the other end of the water pipe, the situation is dramatically different.

The water that runs out of my Winnipeg tap comes from Shoal Lake. That lake has been this city's water source for almost a century. For the Shoal Lake 40 First Nation, located on this lake, 160 kilometres west of Winnipeg and right at the Ontario-Manitoba border, it has been home for much longer than that. It is a bitter irony that whereas the city's need for water has had a deeply destructive effect on the community, the First Nation itself has itself lived under a boil water advisory for the last seventeen years. The community depends for its drinking water on bottled water brought in from Kenora at a cost of 240,000 dollars every year.

During the preparations for the opening of Winnipeg's Canadian Museum for Human Rights, the museum announced that one of its key themes would be that of water as a symbol of healing. This offended members of Shoal Lake 40. In a response, they lit a sacred fire on a hill near the museum and camped there for four days. In doing this, they raised public attention to the fact that the water being used in the museum comes from their lake and that their own human right of access to clean water was being violated as a direct result of this. According to Chief Erwin Redsky, the museum staff recognized the tragedy of the situation, and supported the protesters by providing food as well as firewood for the sacred fire.

In addition, Shoal Lake 40 opened a 'Museum of Canadian Human Rights Violations' on their own reserve, inviting Canadians to learn about the situation they face. On October 9, I was part of a group visiting that museum. During that visit, it became clear to me that this situation involves much more than clean water alone. Settler use of the lake's water has had an impact on the community that is destructive in many ways.

In 1919, the community was moved across the lake to make way for an aqueduct to Winnipeg. The aqueduct crosses not only the old village site, but also a burial ground. "Over 3000 acres of our best land were taken" Chief Erwin Redsky explained during our visit. "Our ancestors were taken. Our burial sites were taken." The community has never been compensated for these losses.

Later, a channel was dug to redirect dirty water away from the aqueduct intake and from Falcon Lake, a popular cottage area. This turned the peninsula into an artificial island, literally cutting its inhabitants off from the outside world. In order to enter or to leave the reserve, community members must now either use a ferry (in the summer) or cross the ice (in the winter). Chief Redsky: "We live under curfew here. We have got to be home by a certain time. If you miss the last barge here, you are out of luck for the night." During spring and fall, no transportation is available whatsoever, leaving the community cut off from the outer world.

For life necessities, people have to risk their lives, as crossing the ice is very dangerous. Over the years, many community members have died, and many others nearly so. Despite this loss of life, a direct effect of

the artificial isolation that was imposed on Shoal Lake 40 without their consent, there still is no year-round road or bridge.

The lack of year-round transportation affects everyday life in numerous ways. Isolation has created poverty – without reliable access to the outside world, economic development is virtually impossible. As a result of all these circumstances, the population of Shoal Lake 40, around 270 people, is dwindling, with more and more community members living off-reserve. During our visit, Chief Redsky, pointed out how a bridge and a permanent road would help to address many of the issues that the community faces. He called on us visitors to take responsibility in helping undo the damage that has been done.

We as visitors were struck by our own complicity. The isolation, the poverty and the loss of life: none of it would have happened were it not for the unilateral and invasive settler decisions that we as Winnipeggers still benefit from every day. In their work to overcome these issues, the people of Shoal Lake 40 are inviting Winnipeggers to visit the reserve and its museum, to meet the community, to hear its stories, to find out where their water comes from, and to hold our authorities responsible. This invitation is also a call to settlers to overcome the spirit of separation that almost a hundred years ago cut off Shoal Lake 40 from the outer world, and that we still maintain today by enjoying cheap, clean water without reflecting on its source.

Lawrence Thiessen, member of Hope Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Man.

Naming Our True Names

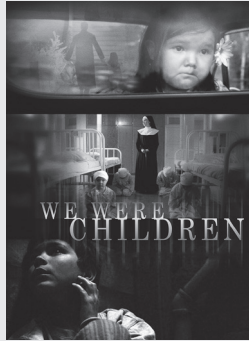
A Review of Two Residential School Films

Since the beginning of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2009, several films have been made about the Indian Residential Schools (IRS) that were run by various Christian denominations and the Canadian government between the 1880s and 1970s. Two of these films are *We Were Children* and *Yummo Comes Home*.

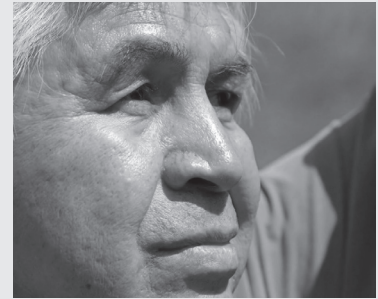
We Were Children tells the story of Lyna Hart and Glen Anaquod through interviews interspersed with dramatization of their experiences at the schools. It depicts the complex relationships between Indigenous communities and the churches, between parents, church leaders and children. The film also highlights the essential purpose of the IRS system – to assimilate Indigenous children into settler society through conversion to western European Christianity – and narrates the traumatic impact this had on both the children, as well as the larger Indigenous community (i.e., intergenerational trauma). A strength of *We Were Children* is that it does not present either the settler Christians or the Indigenous peoples as one-sided, but attempts to display the complexities and conflicting realities of the residential school experience.

Yummo Comes Home tells the stories of Isadore Charters, a residential school survivor, and that of his friend, Mennonite settler Don Klaassen. The men talk about their respective journeys with Christianity, naming the colonial and missional harms that were inflicted, but also the good they came to see in their faith tradition when it was practiced very differently than in the residential schools. Like *We Were Children*, *Yummo Comes Home* addresses the loss of culture, language, traditions, and the trauma of residential schools, while also presenting moments of resistance to colonization and assimilation.

One fascinating aspect in each of the films has to do with the power of names and naming. All three of the Indigenous people in the films underwent a forced name change. All three identify this name change that they experienced in residential school as a life-altering experience. In *We Were Children*, the first name that Lyna Hart hears at residential school is “savage,”



We Were Children.
Directed by Tim Wolochatiuk
National Film Board of Canada, 2012.
Film. 88 min. \$24.95.



Yummo Comes Home.
Directed by Don Klaassen
Outreach Canada, 2013.
Film. 28 min. \$20.00.

applied to her body and people by a nun. Soon after, she receives a second identifier – “Number 99.” Glen Anaquod had a similar experience, beginning his story with the number he was given, “118.” Of course, we don’t even see these as names; they are mere digits, which makes them all the more dehumanizing. Similarly, in *Yummo Comes Home*, Yummo tells us the many names he carries; the name given to him at birth by his Indigenous community, his childhood nickname (Yummo), and the Christian name given to him at the residential school (Isadore Charters). He remembers feeling happy about his new name when it was given to him. Like any child who puts on a costume and plays pretend, we can imagine that it must have been exciting to pretend to be someone else. But the novelty soon wore off. When Isadore talks about why he felt he had to return to the residential school, he remarks: “I had to bring little Yummo back outta there.”

Settler peoples, like myself, have a hard time grasping how deeply traumatizing the experience is of being renamed by others. Naming is such an important part of how we understand who we are and who others are. Names that we call each other build us up or tear us down. Naming is a practice

of power. While watching the scenes of renaming in the films, I was reminded of a poem by the Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hahn. The poem describes the different ways in which Hahn identifies himself with many different ways of being in this world. He writes, for example, “I am the frog swimming happily in the clear water of a pond. And I am the grass-snake that silently feeds itself on the frog.” Hahn identifies with both animals and their very different lifeways. This could mean he sees himself as being part of life and death, at once victim and perpetrator.

Yummo, Lyna, and Glen all experienced different kinds of trauma during their time at residential school. As Don Klaassen says, “Like so many with childhood trauma, unless the truth is told and acknowledged as real by others, the trauma just continues.” He adds, “We can’t change the past, but we can change the ongoing effects of the past.” I think one of the ways that we can do this work of healing is by calling ourselves by our true names, whether we are settler Christians, Indigenous Christians, traditional Indigenous peoples, or immigrants from other cultures and religious traditions. In his poem, Hahn seeks to call himself by his true names. What would it mean for each of us – and the collective bodies that we are a



Events

part of (like the church) - to call ourselves by our true names and to invite others to do the same? What names have we been given by people we trust? What names have we given ourselves? What names have others called us that have been hurtful or empowering?

Personally, it has been important to call myself not only Mennonite, Christian, German, Woman, Disciple of Jesus, but also Settler and Colonizer. I can identify with all of those names. I can see myself in all of those stories. It can be very challenging to identify as a settler, but I believe it is important to name that truth and acknowledge the trauma in it.

At the end of *Yummo Comes Home*, Yummo offers profound words of truth and hope:

“We gotta grow together. Don’t feel bad, because you didn’t do it or you couldn’t help then. But now that you know the story [of the Indian residential schools] you can help by passing the story on, by walking with us.”

Calling ourselves by our many “true” names is a way of passing on the reality of residential school oppression so that something like that may never happen again, and so that we can enter a path of healing together. As Hahn writes: “Please call me by my true names / so I can hear all my cries and my laughter at once / so I can see that my joy and pain are one [...] so that the door of my heart can be left open / the door of compassion.”

We Were Children and *Yummo Comes Home* are important films. They can take us to a place of honesty with ourselves. They can open doors of justice and reconciling restoration in our lives.

Melanie Kampen is a member of Springfield Heights Mennonite Church, is a graduate of Conrad Grebel, and works at Siloam Mission in Treaty 1, Winnipeg, Man.



January 13, 2013 – *This day in Indigenous-Settler history: Three prominent Canadians — Maude Barlow, Naomi Klein and Sarah Slean — return their Diamond Jubilee medals to the government in solidarity with Idle No More and Chief Spence. Spence was on a hunger strike, seeking a meeting with the Crown regarding broken treaties.*

February 14, 2015: Sisters in Spirit Valentine’s Vigil/March. In every major urban city across Canada, native and non-native communities gather to grieve and protest the loss of missing and murdered indigenous women. See <http://womensmemorialmarch.wordpress.com/national>.

February 15, 2015: Jubilee Fund Application due date – The Jubilee Fund offers an annual grant to support initiatives involved in reconnecting people to their traditional land base, protection and reclamation of sacred sites and traditional or treaty land, sustainable land use, and environmental justice initiatives. The Fund is jointly administered by Mennonite Church Canada Indigenous Relations and Mennonite Central Committee Indigenous Neighbours. For more details and an application form, see <http://home.mennonitechurch.ca/indigenous/jubilee-details/>

February 14-23, 2015: The Aboriginal Justice Team of CPT is facilitating a special Student Delegation. Explore what it means to live in right relationship with the earth and each other. Find out what it means to be an ally to Indigenous communities engaged in healing, resisting colonialism and struggling for sovereignty. For more info see www.cpt.org/work/aboriginal_justice.

March 13, 2015: Building Bridges Event featuring guest teacher Mark MacDonald (the National Indigenous Anglican Bishop). Circle of Life Thunderbird House, Winnipeg, MB, Treaty 1.

March 14, 2015: Manitoba Partnership Circle Gathering. A day of learning and conversation with Bishop Mark MacDonald in Manigotagan, MB.



Community News

Harold Bennett of Matheson Island, Manitoba died peacefully on October 17, 2014 at the age of 78 years at the Betel Home in Gimli, MB. The funeral service was held in the Matheson Island Community Hall on October 23, 2014 with burial at the Matheson Island Cemetery. Harold’s working years were spent as deckhand, mate and then captain on boats plying Lake Winnipeg and the Mackenzie River. He was also a commercial fisher, had a trap line, and was an active member of the Matheson Island community, where he served as mayor. Harold is survived by his wife Doreen, son Terry (Janet), daughter Candace, 5 grandchildren, 2 great-grandchildren and extended family.

Katherine Owen of Pauingassi passed away in Winnipeg on September 22 at the age of 64 after being on dialysis for many years. She is survived by her husband of 47 years, Charlie Peter Owen, 1 sister, 5 children, many grandchildren and a host of friends. Interment took place at Pauingassi with Allan Owens officiating.

Elijah Crow of Pauingassi passed away at Pauingassi at the age of 86. He had been struggling with health issues for some time. He is survived by 4 children, grandchildren and many friends. He is very much missed by his family that took care of him right to the end. He was predeceased by his wife Mary, his parents, siblings and 5 children. Interment took place at Pauingassi with Allan Owens officiating.

