

Volume 79 • Number 7/8 • July/August 1996

Family reunions/family history

The Episcopal Theological Seminary of the Southwest
Austin, Texas

The collage features several distinct illustrations:

- Top Left:** A circular portrait of a woman in a dark dress, possibly a religious figure or a portrait of a notable figure.
- Top Center:** A scene with a large wooden wheel, possibly a cart or a well, with several people around it, including a woman in a long dress and a man in a suit.
- Top Right:** A portrait of a woman in a long dress, looking slightly to the side.
- Middle Left:** A scene with a woman in a long dress and a man in a suit, possibly a religious or social gathering.
- Middle Center:** A group of people, including men in suits and hats, and a woman in a long dress, standing together.
- Middle Right:** A portrait of a woman in a long dress, looking slightly to the side.
- Bottom Left:** A scene with a woman in a long dress and a man in a suit, possibly a religious or social gathering.
- Bottom Center:** A group of people, including men in suits and hats, and a woman in a long dress, standing together.
- Bottom Right:** A scene with a woman in a long dress and a man in a suit, possibly a religious or social gathering.

Faces of Islam

PLEASE SEND THE MAY ISSUE of *The Witness* to Imam Djojic Osman in Underwood, Australia. He was most impressed with the Islam issue. It's amazing how every issue comes at a most opportune time. Please know how much my subscription is valued and treasured.

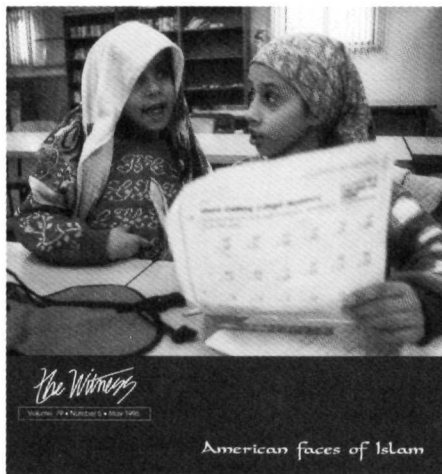
Maureen Clegg
Rosalie, Australia

'Left-wing Anglicans'

PLEASE SIGN ME UP. I was pleased to actually see the phrase "left-wing Anglican" in print [in your ad], as it is sometimes considered an oxymoron by the world at large. I have been both — on the democratic left and an Anglican in the historic catholic tradition — for years, but have despaired of ever finding a community where those two parts of my life are not seen as evidence of severe schizophrenia.

That's a view I find unfounded and unfair, of course. In the world's theory (after Marxism, as Ronald Aronson has put it) and theology (after Heidegger and Rahner), the two not only meet but almost seem to entail one another. It's just that I thought I might be alone in trying to trace out those implications.

And I have frankly gotten tired of what I call the pincer movement of praxis: on one side, sophomoric anti-religious rhetoric from the left, as though the core of Christianity — the crucified and risen Logo — could have anything to do with a semi-fascist ideology of obedience and obscurantism that has usurped its name and symbols in pursuit of money and political power. And on the other side, reactionary rants from Anglicans who seem to think that any admission of our tradition's essential ties to the catholic church, "the charms of the chasuble," somehow implies homophobia, Victorian smarm and the



Dickensian dystopia of the Republican party.

John M. Kappes
Cleveland Heights, OH

I RECENTLY USED ARTICLES from *The Witness* (economic justice and lying) for an ethics class I am taking at a Jesuit school. The articles met my need and the professor's response was positive. Thanks!

M.L. Scott
Silverdale, WA

I READ *THE WITNESS* FOR YEARS. In fact, I believe the long-term effect of reading *The Witness* helped me pass my G.O.E.s [General Ordination Exams] back in 1982. Just recently I received a copy of the sin issue, March 1995.

This December I went on retreat at a yoga center and began feeling bereft of Christian symbols. I just happened to bring the magazine along for reading. However, I used the front cover [by Marek Czarnecki] as my Christian icon. I propped it up on the window sill. As I prayed my way through the week, I found the image a source of great comfort.

I would like to subscribe again.

I would appreciate an article on the use of 401K or 403Bs. As someone in the regular work force these retirement plans mean a great deal, especially to small income earners. Some plans don't provide for socially conscious mutual funds, i.e. Pax World Fund. I am fascinated by the tension between money and social justice, and in particular how to

live a spiritual life and yet be real enough to survive economically. Food for thought.

E. Louise Forrest
Forrest Landscape Design
West Roxbury, MA

Witness criticism

KINDLY ERASE ALL MY NAMES from your lists.

CEASE & DESIST from Further Mailings.

Thanks for past efforts.

I do not believe in the non-existent.

I do not believe in people who believe in the non-existent.

Q: Are religions insanity?

A: Yes.

C.C. Pool
Water Mill, NY

Witness praise

I AM CONSTANTLY GLADDENED at the high quality magazine which you produce month after month. It has got to be the best magazine of its kind in the country.

H. Coleman McGehee
Bloomfield Hills, MI

THANK YOU FOR ANOTHER YEAR OF thought-provoking articles, poems, news, etc. Thank you for enabling me and so many others to seek first God's kingdom and its justice.

Paul Butler
London, England

BEAUTIFUL MAGAZINE — both aesthetically and spiritually.

Robert J. Dobie
Springfield, PA

I GO BACK TO THE BILL SPOFFORD days with *The Witness*. I haven't been receiving it — probably expired during the many moves I've made. Now I would like to receive *The Witness*. It's always superb!

Roger Blanchard
Round Pond, ME

Letters

Tribute to heroes

WHEN NEWS CAME OF THE assassination of President Kennedy, Dr. Howard E. Thurman (himself now deceased) said of this fallen hero in his eulogy given in Lagos, Nigeria: "The time and place of a man's life on earth are the time and place of his body, but the meaning and significance of his life are as vast and far-reaching as his gifts, his times, and the passionate commitment of all his powers can make it."

Recently, our beloved country in general, and the African American and Jewish communities in particular, sustained great losses in the passing of several of their heroes, whose names will forever and indelibly be etched on the pages of history as well as our collective memories.

On the very same day, we received "a double whammy" when word came of the passing of Carl Burton Stokes and Ronald Henry Brown.

Then less than two weeks later, we learned of the passing of Rabbi Arthur Lelyveld, retired, the spiritual leader of Fairmount Temple in Beachwood for 28 years.

No history of the civil rights struggle would be accurate, were it to exclude the contributions of these fallen heroes. Further, any African American who does not know and appreciate the work of Rabbi Lelyveld (and luminaries such as Rabbi Stephen Wise) is tragically and pathetically uninformed.

We know well how Ambassador Stokes rose from the public housing projects of Cleveland to local, national and international prominence. He shattered to smithereens the long-held but spurious notion that African Americans could not govern — and do so responsibly and compassionately.

We know well how Secretary Brown rose from Harlem to local, national and international prominence. With implicit trust in the essential goodness of people, they built coalitions and proved that people of divergent backgrounds and opinions can indeed "come and reason together" for the common good of all.

What is remarkable about Ambassador Stokes and Secretary Brown is that in their ascent to power and prominence, they never forgot their roots. They took their communi-

ties with them and made us all stand taller. They must surely have known well the words of Mordecai to his cousin, Esther: "Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for such a time as this."

The record of their valor refreshes African Americans, especially when we consider that national embarrassment who holds a lifetime seat on the highest tribunal in our land.

What many may not know is that Rabbi Lelyveld could have chosen to luxuriate in suburban comfort and isolation. He could have "passed by on the other side." However, his understanding of the compelling and prophetic urge and tenets of his faith would not permit him to make peace with the oppression of any race or class anywhere.

He knew what God required of him, as said the Prophet Micah, and he lived and acted on this knowledge.

Beaten in Mississippi in order that America might be freed from its "gloomy past," Rabbi Lelyveld identified in thought, words and actions, gifts and abilities, with the struggles of African Americans to be legally, politically and socially unfettered "in a land in which their fathers were strangers."

Seeing Cleveland, America and world as they were, and daring to envision what they yet could become, Rabbi Lelyveld acted on that "ominous stern Delphic whisper, 'they enslave their children's children who make compromise with sin.'"

Well said Lowell in "The Present Crisis":

"Then to side with truth is noble,
When we share her wretched crust,
Ere her cause bring fame and profit,
And 'tis prosperous to be just;
Then it is the brave man chooses,
While the coward stands aside
Till the multitude make virtue
Of the faith they had denied."

"Let us now praise famous men.....They made a name for themselves by their valor." We are all immeasurably the richer because they touched our lives.

In the Christian tradition we say, "inasmuch as you did it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me."

Austin R. Cooper, Sr.
Past President,
Cleveland Branch of NAACP

Classifieds

Economic justice

The founding conference of the Episcopal Network for Economic Justice is scheduled for Nov. 22-24 at Mercy Center in Burlingame, Calif. near San Francisco. Workshops will focus on the church's role in community development and with financial institutions. Contact John Hooper, Economic Justice Commission, Diocese of Michigan, 4800 Woodward Ave., Detroit, MI 48201; 313-833-4413 for further information.

Vocations

Contemplating religious life? Members of the Brotherhood and the Companion Sisterhood of Saint Gregory are Episcopalians, clergy and lay, married and single. To explore a contemporary Rule of Life, contact: The Director of Vocations, Brotherhood of St. Gregory, Saint Bartholomew's Church, 82 Prospect Street, White Plains NY 10606-3499.

Marketing Director

The Other Side, a Christian magazine on peace and justice issues, is seeking a full-time marketing director to strategize outreach to new and current subscribers, conceptualize and produce creative marketing materials, and analyze results. Experience in marketing and/or magazine publishing desirable. Excellent benefits. Applications being accepted immediately. Contact Hiring Team, *The Other Side*, 300 W. Apsley Street, Philadelphia, PA 19144 (215-849-2178).

Classifieds

Witness classifieds cost 75 cents a word or \$30 an inch, whichever is less. Payments must accompany submissions. Deadline is the 15th of the month, two months prior to publication. For instance, items received January 15 will run in March.

When ads mark anniversaries of deaths, ordinations, or acts of conscience, photos — even at half column-width — can be included.

THE WITNESS

Since 1917

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This month Vital Signs reports on reactions to the decision of the ecclesiastical court to dismiss the "heresy" charges against Walter Righter.

Cover: Mural in Philadelphia, Penn., commemorating the black family, artist unknown. Photographed by Deborah Moses-Sanks, Impact Visuals.

Back Cover: Harris family reunion in Iredell County, N. C. by Robert Amberg, Impact Visuals. Text by Trish Hanly of St. Helena, Calif. is reprinted from The Sun magazine. See p. 22.

Family histories as freedom tools

by Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann

Many of us will be asked to attend family reunions this summer — to visit those we do not choose but with whom we are linked forever.

Most reunions will include handouts, maybe even T-shirts, depicting the family tree. Someone who spends hours poring over census data will attempt to make vivid the lives of those long dead with whom you have a blood tie.

Preparing for this issue, Marianne Arbogast mentioned that she felt like she had been invited to watch another family's home movies — material would flicker by without context or meaning for any but those who had lived the lives. Can't a search for pedigree distract us from our ultimate identity? she asked.

Another friend, raised by adoptive parents and estranged from birth parents, asked, how do you define family? Aren't those you *choose* to live your life with family?

Linda Strohmier, Episcopal Church Evangelism officer, who shares my interest in family history even to tracking an ancestor through the records of the *Bibliothèque Nationale* in Paris, offers a definitive answer — through faith we have family, not by blood but by spirit.

I know that all three of these women speak truth.

Like each of them, I have good friends whom I call family and sometimes church. And yet, I return over and over again to genealogical libraries tracking my ancestors. When I find the name of a great-great-grandmother's parents, I feel the

communion of saints opening out. I imagine the people whose lives became the flesh of my parents. Sometimes I think I can almost hear their sighs and songs.

For those who are adopted, I know the traditions of their adoptive parents are key, but I believe they also dream in the symbols of their blood lines. When people talk of past lives, I suspect they are recalling lives lived by their ancestors.

I suspect that there is even a desire on the part of the ancestors for our histories

American history is more diverse, more dubious and more human than we have ever been taught. And we have a place in it.

to be uncovered. It is common to hear that people found a homestead, a grave, missing records entirely by intuition. A good friend has dreams of African American families — she can see them through the wall. Only last year she learned that one of her ancestor's homes was on the underground railroad.

Fascinated by a third great-grandfather, I found (through an impulsive flip through a card catalogue) a poem that he had written about his own life for someone in the generations to come. His story about himself is mixed. Lauded by others as a doctor, Christian and soldier, Atlee reveals himself as a risk-taker who gambled and had to be carried home from the bars before he found religion. His self-description is so much more alive than the stories told by those who use family history to justify themselves.

My experience with Atlee is just the beginning of the revelations promised in genealogical research. What's true for a great-great-great-grandfather is true for the nation. American history is more diverse, more dubious and more human than we have ever been taught. And we have a place in it that affects our current relationships. Not knowing our history — even denying it — can make us crazy and can help perpetuate myths, like those of racial purity (page 16).

During a visit to the Mormon genealogical library in Salt Lake City, Erika Meyer met people who discovered immediate relationships to the Salem witch trials and slave trading (page 12).

Gloria House Manana recently learned of her great-grandmother's death at the hands of the Klan — an incident her elders rarely discuss (page 20).

Nancy Wanshon has made a vocation of gathering pieces of American Indian history to restore her own connection to her people and to heal the memory of her tribe (page 30).

Knowing who we are and who we have come from can help us break free of the imperial version of history, according to Ched Myers (page 8). The particulars of our stories contain the nuance and the secrets that can break open not only family systems, but the imperial story that distorts the truth and limits our imaginations.

Honoring our actual history is a way of joining the prayers offered by those seven generations behind us with our own for those who will follow. **TW**

Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann is editor/publisher of *The Witness*.

editor's note

Proud to be part of the family

by Anne E. Cox

In general, family reunions haven't meant much to me. When I was a kid we went to the Reeves Family Reunion and to the Pritchard Family Reunion. I think my great-grandmother's mother was a Reeves and my great-grandfather's mother was a Pritchard. My great-grandparents and my grandmother knew almost everyone. My role was to be polite when summoned by my elders to be introduced to Great-great-aunt Mary or Cousin Clyde. The food, I recall, was always good. Both of those large southern families know how to make fried chicken, country ham biscuits, deviled eggs, lima beans with corn and pound cake. The food and the stories my elders would tell on the way home about whose children were doing what and who is not looking like she'll make it to next year's reunion were the chief benefits of those annual excursions.

One of the Pritchards compiled a genealogy tracing the family back to Wales — probably stopping when a connection to royalty was established — pinpointing 1720 as when the first Pritchard landed in this country, immediately settling in Piedmont North Carolina, where most of the family still resides. On the other side, my mother's sister has traced out their ancestry, aided significantly by the Freedom of Information Act and computers, and presented copies to all concerned one Christmas. None of these tomes have held my attention longer than the time it took to make sure my date of birth was correct. (Though I did look up Anne Hairsine, my great-great-grandmother, for whom I was named — the family lore is that she was

the youngest of 13 children who came with their mother from England after their father, a carpenter, fell to his death while working on building a church.)

I've had to look outside of the official family reunions and genealogical charts to find out about the silent branch of the family, those men and women who don't have spouses or children attached to their names, those bachelors and spinsters sprinkled throughout all of our family trees. I want to know their stories, because my suspicion is that their stories are somewhat similar to mine. Currently, in my aunt's compendium, I am one of those single relatives, caught in an endless childhood, since adulthood seems to be contingent upon marriage and children. My younger married sister appears more adult than I do, especially now that she has a daughter.

The history in which I am interested is the history of my gay and lesbian family.

I have devoured books like *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*. There is a whole sub-genre of "coming-out stories" that at various times have satisfied

my craving for knowing how others have handled that right of passage for all gay and lesbian people. I read this literature to learn about the heroic as well as the silent, the joys and the struggles, the pioneers and the followers in my family.

Probably the greatest reunions of this great gay family are the various Pride parades around the country. Not being one for big parties, I've never participated in the parades, but it sure was a kick

when I happened to be in San Francisco five years ago the day of their Pride Parade. The family is quite diverse. I felt a kinship with everyone that day.

I have small reunions, friendships with other lesbians who gather for dinner, and larger gatherings of lesbian and gay clergy. Every time this branch of my family comes together, I know I have something in common with every single person there. We've had to come out, acknowledge rather than suppress our sexual orientations; we are assaulted constantly by negative family images, hearing from legislators condemning our "lifestyle" and spewing anti-"special rights" rhetoric; we know we might be in physical danger if we even hold hands in public with those closest to us; we live in a world of "don't ask — don't tell"; those of us within the church have to figure out how to live with debates and trials to determine our fitness as dearly beloved children of God. And so we know we are kin.

I like knowing this history because I feel less alone. I know there are others who have made life-giving choices similar to mine; some have suffered, some

I've had to look outside of the official genealogical charts to find out about the silent branch of the family, those men and women who don't have spouses or children.

have not. It's sort of like knowing about the history of the early church, when some were martyred because they were Christians, while

others lived quiet, faithful lives, accepted and tolerated, and still others sacrificed to the Roman gods in public while professing Christian beliefs privately.

I also like knowing this history because it is about an irrepressible Spirit, an incarnational Spirit that takes life and love seriously. It's about a family and a spirit that lives in spite of the pervasive pressure to consign us to dead branches of other family trees.

TW

An Episcopal priest, **Anne E. Cox** is a contributing editor of *The Witness*.

Hotdogs, iced tea, forgotten promises, summernights

by Sherry Hewett

Mother
stands in the
driveway

eyes
waiting
bright
with all we have been,
heart
full
of what we might yet be.

We come home on hot, sultry July days
wriggling out of cars, tumbling in to and out of arms,
brimming with offerings:
t-shirts, sunglasses, cool pastasalads, warm hotdogs,
Fritos, wines, puppies, rubber rafts, sandals,
apologies, compliments,
clichés about having been remiss
in this or that,
all
interlaced with hopes of
new beginnings.

We are sanctified as
last year's disappointments, hurts
go down with
shared meals.

We become each other's seasons
marking the passing of time.

We wonder at the changes life has wrought;
help each other ignore those we are afraid of,
embrace the ones
that deliver us to
courage.

Sisters plant new flowers
on Daddy's grave at the
church cemetery.
I thank the
giant oak tree
for being his sentinel, heavenly marker.

Reluctantly, yet ready, renewed, redeemed
we leave
one by one,
hallowed by one another's touch
Light kisses, moist hugs,
promises we know may be un-
fulfilled
mark our departure
til next year
when again,

Mother
stands in the driveway
consecrating us with her love
helping us to see what we are,
a family.

— *Sherry Hewett lives in Midland, Tex.*

Poetry submissions can be sent to Leslie Williams at 2504
Gulf Ave., Midland, Tex. 79705.



Family history as political therapy

by Ched Myers

Ched Myers leads workshops on national spirituality and politics which include a focus on family history. Myers, a Witness contributing editor, lives in Los Angeles.

Most of us in the U.S. suffer from a profound alienation from history. In our imperial culture, inconvenient historical narratives have tended to be silenced while legitimating narratives have been mystified. We live with a peculiarly unaccountable, if not amnesiac, relationship toward the past.

Whether we recognize it or not, however, our past remains embedded in our present, an umbilical cord between the children of today and the parents of long ago. What Freud said about the self ("That which is unconscious is bound to be repeated") Santayana affirmed in terms of society: "Those who do not remember history are doomed to repeat it."

In light of this, I have found that family history work can be an important tool in deepening our commitment to the theology and practice of justice and peace. It enables us to discover how our ancestors participated in and were impacted by wider collective historical experience. In so doing we discover how trauma (economic displacement or flight from war), oppression (victimization by prejudice or religious persecution) or privilege has shaped our own family story. By grieving tragedy and celebrating goodness we can heal the alienated past.

The "geneagram" is a tool that family therapists look to for evidence of system-

stressors in one's genealogy. While therapists look for alcoholism, suicide and divorce in order to determine intergenerational patterns of trauma, we should also include factors such as cultural tradition, social location and economics.

I encourage participants to try to trace their genealogy back to the generation(s) that emigrated to North America — a formidable but revealing task. We explore the following kinds of questions:

- Under what circumstances did the immigrant generation leave, and how voluntary was it?
- Who did they displace upon arrival in North America, in terms of land and or work?
- What discrimination did they experience, and what strategies of survival or accommodation resulted?

We then look at questions of "cultural erasure" and assimilation over time.

When and how were native languages or dialects suppressed? How did traditional family patterns and distinctive ethnic practices atrophy? How many times did the family move regions? What about ethnic mixing, segregation or racial tensions?

We next probe socio-economic issues. How, if at all, was land procured and wealth obtained and consolidated from generation to generation? What entitlements were passed on, and what internecine rivalries resulted? Was the family fractured along class lines? How was the family system shaped over time

by experiences of unemployment or elite work, by poverty or affluence, by education or lack thereof? What kinds of opportunities were there for women?

Finally we look at political factors. What wars or revolutions impacted our ancestors? What relationship was there to slavery or to the many "Indian wars" across the continent?

This work can show us how the structures of gender, race, and class privilege or oppression have shaped our own families. But it can be difficult work. As significant as what we do know about our family stories is what we do not know, since much information has been suppressed or forgotten. Moreover, our families' self-narratives are inevitably layered with legends and half-truths, as certain things have been idealized, scapegoated, or covered up. For these reasons participants often feel frustrated in this inquiry, or are surprised at how the exercise provokes deep feelings of anxiety, confusion, or sadness.

At one workshop, a woman from New Orleans began to weep as she remem-

Most of us in the U.S. suffer from a profound alienation from history. We live with a peculiarly unaccountable, if not amnesiac, relationship toward the past.

bered her Cajun grandfather reading to her from the prayerbook in French. A priest grimaced as he told of the civil struggle in Ireland during the 1920s that resulted in his family's migra-

tion and of the anti-Irish sentiment they encountered in the U.S. A friend from Nebraska was deeply troubled when, at his family centennial, he discovered that his German immigrant great-great-grandfather had been given squatters rights on Indian land through the Homestead Act of 1862. A Canadian school teacher told about how his 19th-century Scottish ancestors were given cheap one-way tickets

Dierdre Luzwick is an artist in Cambridge, Wis.



The Oracle

Dierdre Luzwick

to the end of the train line in western Canada, and seemed to understand that they were being used as a “buffer class” between the wilderness and the settled cities.

At another workshop I was impressed at the recurring phenomenon of “family jokes” that allude to “shady” circumstances in the immigrant generation. One woman spoke about her Italian grandfather’s “Mafia” connections; another referred to her ancestors as “Irish rogues”; a third man shared that his Swiss grandparents were laughingly called “cow-thieves.” My own father used to joke that his Mexican ancestors “should have stolen land instead of horses.” These are all related as humorous family lore, yet one wonders whether they might not articulate an unconscious derogation of one’s own immigrant roots. Might this subtle form of self-contempt be a way of distancing oneself from embarrassing class origins, or of coping with the pain of severance from the homeland — or both?

Therapists are beginning to recognize the ways in which contemporary immigrant families trade their mental health (which is embedded in cultural identity) for conformity, in order to survive both racism and economic marginalization in the strange and new land. What toll did these same trade-offs take on our ancestors? Does persistent anti-immigrant sentiment in America — a nation of immigrants — suggest that there is something unresolved in our collective unconscious about these traumas?

We have lauded the immigrant habit of remaking their names, their stations and their destinies. But Wallace Stegner reminds us that “the rootlessness that expresses energy and a thirst for the new and an aspiration toward freedom and personal fulfillment has just as often been a curse. Our migratoriness has hindered us from becoming a people of communities and traditions.”

Excavating family texts helps unmask myth and reality in the American “melting pot” experience, particularly concerning social mobility and displacement. It also clarifies the socio-historical matrix of inherited family patterns. These can be as shadowy as secrets concerning miscegenation, as simple as why certain foods are enjoyed, or as fundamental as the tendency for one parent’s cultural or class heritage to receive more emphasis in a family than the other’s.

With this historical pedagogy, Third World students might not feel quite so alienated, for they would have equal place to tell their stories and vent their feelings about past injustices. Dominant culture students, on the other hand, would learn that history is about “open” wounds, not a closed and irrelevant past.

Connecting our own family texts with the wider historical context offers us an understanding of who we truly are. This is a different way of learning history from our rote memorization of the names and deeds of presidents and generals in school. It is historical narrative from the perspective of regular folk. In such an approach we assuredly encounter the main plot lines of the dominant history: in the case of my family, a major European war, the effects of the English industrial revolution and the saga of the transcontinental railroad. But we also meet rich ethnic variations, hidden stories, and regional sub-plots: Wisconsin farmers, Bavarians in New Orleans, and Hispanics in the gold fields.

How different the teaching and learning of history in school would be if it proceeded upon such inductive lines! Why not allow a portrait of bigger historical events and forces to emerge from the reconstructed texts of each student’s family story? Rather than committing disembodied dates and names to short term memory, I suspect students would become interested in historical data that is linked to their family. This was certainly the case for me. As an anti-war activist I am interested in the Franco-Prussian war because it made some of my ancestors refugees and resisters. The Jacobs’ emigrated from Bavaria to Louisiana to escape the emerging German empire and the Franco-German war in 1870.

As an advocate for immigrants’ rights I am interested in the social history of early 19th-century England because it pushed my ancestors out. I yearn to know why a poor man would leave the Azores for California. Francisco Mendosa came to California in 1848 via Veracruz Mexico, and married a Mexican Californian. He ended up a day laborer in the Sierra foothills.

With such an historical pedagogy Third World students might not feel quite so alienated, for they would have equal place to tell their stories and vent their feelings about past injustices. Dominant culture students, on the other hand, would learn that history is about “open” wounds, not a closed and irrelevant past. Everyone would find things to feel proud about as well as to mourn. In short, such students would get to know the real America — one they would want to remember.

“In this way history can serve as cultural therapy, releasing for us and our students the repressed images of our full humanity,” writes anthropologist Christopher Vecsey. I concur with him that by re-connecting with history we “envision ourselves darkly” so that we can in turn “imagine ourselves richly.”

TAY

Anti-immigrant vigilantes

Latino activists in San Diego have denounced a vigilante group calling itself the Airport Posse, which has been patrolling the San Diego International Airport looking for illegal immigrants boarding planes to other U.S. cities. The group's members, who carry video cameras and wear T-shirts with a logo which resembles the U.S. Border Patrol insignia, have been impersonating federal officers and intimidating people on the basis of their skin color, critics charge. A temporary restraining order barring the group's activities was secured at the end of May.

The Philadelphia Inquirer, 5/24/96

Disarmament fast

Tom and Donna Howard-Hastings, jailed in Wisconsin for nonviolent civil disobedience at the site of Project ELF (a component of the U.S. nuclear missile-launching command structure), began a fast May 19 against the court's protection of a facility which they believe to be in violation of "international and natural laws." The fast is a relay, with Tom Howard-Hastings taking the first week and Donna Howard-Hastings continuing the second week.

"We are inviting any citizen who wants to participate in this effort to shut down Project ELF by nonviolent force to join in this disarmament community fast," Tom Howard-Hastings writes. "We will break fast when the judge acts to enjoin further ELF operations (except dismantlement), recuses himself or until October 9 [World Hunger Day]."

They ask that anyone wishing to participate write one of them in jail (221 E. 7th, Ashland, WI 54806) to let them know which days you will fast; write Judge Eaton, Ashland County Courthouse, Ashland, WI 54806; and contact media and/or elected representatives informing them of your act of conscience.

Eat what your ancestors ate

The healthiest diet for you may be the foods your ancestors ate, according to

ethnobotanist Gary Nabhan. Nabhan's theory—that ethnic groups' metabolisms adapted to the foods available in their surrounding environments—has been supported by research among the native O'odham people of southern Arizona.

Although diabetes was virtually unheard of among the O'odham until 50 years ago, they now suffer the highest rate of diabetes of any ethnic group worldwide. Fifty percent of adults over 35 are affected, and the diabetes-related mortality rate is 10.8 times that of European Americans.

When O'odham individuals switched to the desert foods of their ancestors (including mesquite pods, cacti fruits, acorns and chia seeds), they lost weight and their health problems often disappeared. Many of these foods contain a high proportion of "slow-release" starch, and also slow the digestion and absorption processes. According to Nabhan, the sugar-absorbing metabolism of the O'odham evolved to match the foods they traditionally harvested.

WomenWise, Spring, 1994

Stringfellow's influence

I attended the May conference at Washington and Lee University on the life and legacy of William Stringfellow. The conference was broken into three conversations: vocation, faith-based politics, and rebuilding the city—voices from the margins.

Vocation in Stringfellow's understanding, is nothing more than being human and celebrating human life within the event of the fall. Stringfellow lived this by moving to the margin. From the beginning of his life as a middle class Episcopalian youth, each step he chose led him to the periphery. Instead of pursuing the priesthood, he chose to remain a lay person who studied theology. Instead of taking up his place in a prestigious law firm after graduating from Harvard, he moved to Harlem and represented the poor, homosexuals, and people on heresy charges. His whole vocational life is seen as an attempt to bear witness to the reality of life while surrounded by the power of death and destruction. The job of the church

is to claim the freedom to die and move to the margin.

In the second conversation we learned that for Stringfellow the Bible is a political book that undermines the ruling establishment. I felt that Jim Wallis' and Michael Lerner's presentations, although solid, seemed to suggest that Stringfellow would sanction their political agendas (the Call to Renewal and the Politics of Meaning respectively). Although Stringfellow may have, if he were alive to speak for himself, sanctioned their agendas, in all of my reading of Stringfellow I have never seen him give any hint of a political agenda. In most places, I read of resisting the dominant culture and the political agendas of the powers.

For me, the conversation on rebuilding the city was the most profound. The talk I keep coming back to is Eugene Rivers' comments on the reigning principality in the U.S.: white supremacy (See *The Witness*, 9/96). It is his contention and one that I am coming to believe that the ideology of white supremacy has influenced every area of cultural and social level to such an extent that our entire system, from our economic life to our social policy, has been adversely affected. He cited Saxton's book, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic*, *The Wages of Whiteness* by Roediger and *The Invention Of The White Race* by Ted Allen. He concludes, "A radical conversion to Biblical faith frees us from the irrational idolatry we have created."

—Joe Sellepack, Kalamazoo, MI
A package of six videotapes from the conference is available for \$30.
Contact Margaret Williams, Frances Lewis Law Center, Washington and Lee Law School, Lexington, VA 24450; (540) 463-8509

short takes

Tales from the quest: visiting the Mormon History Library

by Erika Meyer

The passage of time has always fascinated me. As a child I was awed by the notion that the present I currently resided in was once inhabited by other people; I told my mother that I would be an archeologist. As an adolescent I spent afternoons scrutinizing family pictures in my grandparents' basement, assigning mythic status to persons and events that caught my imagination. I especially remember an uncle who died young on faraway Iwo Jima. The past, a present which had slipped away, now shimmered with personal and ancestral gods and goddesses.

Recently, I spent two afternoons interviewing others about how they experienced the lure of the past, and their sense of connection to kin long gone from this life. I found my interviewees studiously searching books, databases and microfiche at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City, Utah. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (commonly referred to as "the L.D.S." or "the Mormons") runs the modern four-story library free of charge for church members and non-members alike. As explained to me by a former member of the church, L.D.S. teaching holds that the unit of salvation is the family, not the individual.

"We believe that there is a perfect chain back to Adam for every human being," explains Stephanie Provo, a Family History Records major at BYU (Brigham Young University). "Our work is to figure out the links. Our church teaches that our ancestors who have not

had a chance to hear the Gospel are in the spirit world. I can help my relatives by being their proxy here on earth. I can be baptized for each of them in the Temple and do other work on their behalf. This will link the family correctly. If we do our part on earth we can be together eternally at the end of time."

Almost everyone, whether Mormon or not, seemed earnestly engaged by their labors. I wanted to know what brought them to Utah, traveling from Texas or British Columbia or Switzerland to search for the name of a great-great-great-grandparent. What was behind the search? And why was almost everyone I spoke with so interesting to listen to?

"Genealogical research is the third largest hobby in the United States behind stamp and coin collecting," said Gordon (who asked that I not use his last name). His family had a Thanksgiving tradition of reading aloud each year their lineal descent from the Mayflower. At 11 he began doing his own family research and at age 22 with a history degree moved to Salt Lake City to pursue a career in genealogical research. He had definite

ideas about what motivates people to do family history research and how that motivation has changed over time.

"It used to be that a professional genealogist most often worked for clients trying to prove their pedigree for membership in societies like the Daughters of the

American Revolution or exclusive clubs for Mayflower descendants. But since the 1970s and Alex Haley's book, *Roots*, knowing about one's family history has become an interest for its own sake."

Gordon cited the increase in mobility as a major factor. "There are no longer communities with four generations going back in that place." Mobility and a corresponding sense of rootlessness prompts many people to try to regain a sense of roots through family history research. A family history is something to hold on to in a time of rapid social change.

Going AWOL

Gordon's own family was supportive of his childhood hobby until he discovered that a 17th-century ancestor was illegitimate and enthusiasm waned. "People want to find out that they are descended from someone famous or who did something great, not someone infamous."

Gordon discovered an ancestor whom he respected for *not* being a hero. During the Revolutionary War, this ancestor was one of a group of teenage boys charged with the task of guarding a group of Loyalist prisoners. During what would be the only successful prison break of the war, the young guards ran off. Gordon

unearthed their testimonies from the records of an inquiry into the affair. "I was asleep," testified Gordon's relative about the prison break, and "threw down my weapon to save my life."

It was common for Scottish men to have two families, one with a white woman back in Scotland and one with a woman of African descent in Jamaica.

— Carol Smith

Gordon felt a kinship with this young soldier. "Growing up in the Vietnam Era, the issue of sending 18-year-olds to fight was a defining issue for my generation, and it was a similar situation back then. I am glad he was no hero and decided to save his life; if he hadn't, I would not be

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here.”

Gordon introduced me to an acquaintance doing research at his table.

Pat Hatcher was from Dallas, and she too had gotten started doing her own family history 12 years ago. Noting her coiffed hair and casual but polished appearance, I wasn’t surprised to learn that she gives regular talks on genealogical research and had just written a guide on the subject (*Producing a Quality Family History*, Ancestry Publishers). According to Hatcher, folks who get into genealogy are often people who enjoy puzzles. “A lot of us love solving puzzles. Doing family histories is like figuring out a puzzle except as you do the work, the puzzle expands. Many of us are into good mystery stories as well and we pass those back and forth to each other.”

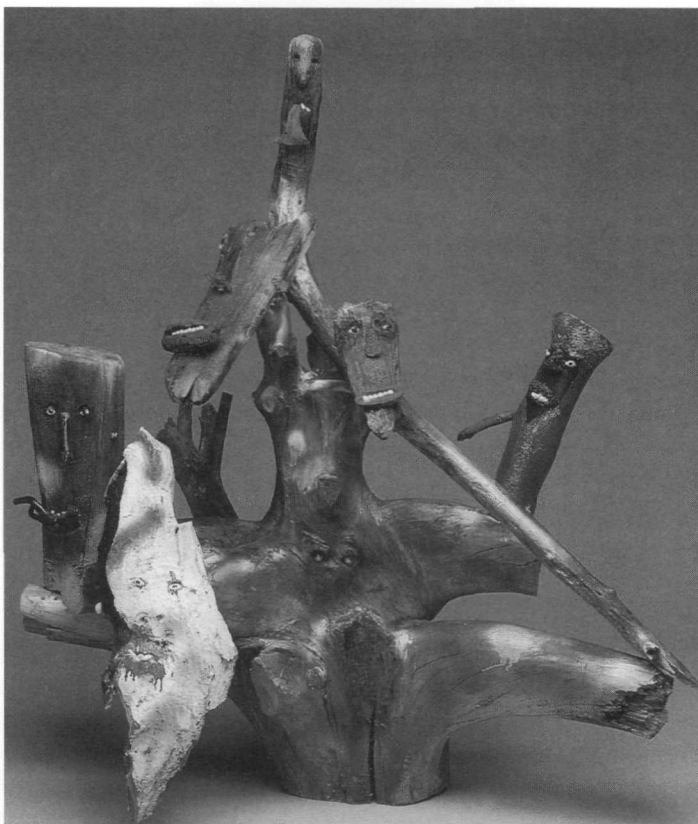
A friend of hers went through a grueling treatment for throat cancer. Hatcher credited the genealogy project the woman took on at the time with giving her the will to live. “It was something she wanted to finish for her children; it kept her up into the night and got her out of bed each morning. It gave her a reason to fight.”

Hatcher encourages the people who ask her advice on research to find out about the context of the times in which their ancestors lived. “I believe in treating ancestors with respect by understanding what they did and why they did it. Food, crops, dress, education, entertainment — all of it is necessary to know about if we are going to respectfully understand those who lived before us. ... We need to know how powerful a motivator was the promise of owning land ... or when I read a two-page list with 40 en-

tries of all a family owned and see a total of three bowls, it is important to ask myself, how did this family eat?”

Salem witch trials

Her own understanding was put to the test when Hatcher learned in her research that she was descended from a man who signed a document during the Salem witch trials.



The family by Bessie Harvey

He was one of several signers responsible for the execution of one of the accused women. Hatcher then found that a close friend was a descendant of the woman who was executed. “We’ve talked a lot about it. As a Methodist, I believe that forgiveness and acceptance are necessary, and I don’t like what he did but I can’t look at him as a totally bad person. At least I don’t feel that the judgment is ultimately mine to make.”

Carol Smith, another library user, enthusiastically talked about her research,

calling it her addiction. “This is what I do instead of television.” Born in Jamaica and raised in England, Smith converted to Mormonism at age 12, and later emigrated to Utah with her husband and children. She is a descendant of mixed Scottish and African heritage. “Out of many, one people,” is the national motto of Jamaica, she informed me. Smith also explained that many Scots were kicked out of their homeland during the Jacobite rebellions in the first half of the 18th century.

“It was common for Scottish men to have two families, one with a white woman back in Scotland and one with a woman of African descent in Jamaica. Eventually the man could return to Scotland, which makes me wonder what became of their Jamaican families.”

In her own case she was able to find out that she was descended from a Scotsman who had a relationship with his maid, a slave named Ann, but he did not appear to have had a second family. They had several children together and Ann took his name, Strachan, but they were never married.

Later, all the children from the union were legitimized in their father’s will.

“These offspring tended to marry children from other interracial unions,” said Smith tracing her finger along her ancestral chart, “but it is the women I want to know about,” said Smith. “There is much more information on the inheriting sons. I want my children to know about the women they are descended from.”

Living with the dead

Smith also talked about a sense of living among the dead. “I can daydream back in

time and imagine what these people were like. I get along better with the dead than I do with the living; live people aggravate me. If you live with the dead you cannot tolerate the living. My grandmother Lydia used to pinch me in church when I wasn't behaving and I used to hate her for it. Now that I'm grown up and a mother and she's dead, those pinches seems like nothing. Now I revere her."

Several people I spoke with mentioned their parents passing on to them a bug for doing research. Often a family story or two were handed down. Sometimes a story from the past would serve to make a claim on a person's behavior in the present. Catherine was a retired teacher from Washington State, living outside of Salt Lake City doing mission work for the L.D.S. Church as an employment counselor. She told me this story:

Her paternal great grandfather, Adam Reed, was a member of the 16th Indiana

Regiment and fought in the Civil War. He served under General George B. McClelland whom he greatly admired. After the war he was allowed to keep the jacket from his uniform. One day he wore this Union jacket to the election polls to cast his vote for his former general who happened to be running against Lincoln. Outside the polls he encountered some ruffians who demanded to know who he was going to vote for. He declared for McClelland. To enter the polls to vote he was forced to fight his way in. To exit, he had to fight the same fellows once again. By the end of it, so the story does, all that was left of that Union jacket was the collar, one sleeve, and a strip down the front. Catherine added that voting had an almost sacred status in her family, a status now maintained by her five children.

There were a number of such stories throughout my interviews that served to personalize history, enlivening names and

dates, and connecting the teller to the past. Occasionally there was a mystery that needed solving or a harsh truth to face: One woman's father had simply refused to ever speak of his family. Another found that her ancestors had once been slave traders, and upon finding the record of a sale of a three-year-old child, slavery was no longer simply history, but part of *her* history.

My own interpretation of the family historians I met is that they were on a quest. Their goal was to discover the particulars that put their own story inside of a larger story, a larger story to which they belonged and which also belonged to them. As the woman with the silent father put it:

"Now that I have answers about my grandmother and what a terribly hard life she endured, it means everything to tell her story to my granddaughter. I cherish this." **TW**

Identifying myself

Dolores Comeaux-Taylor has been studying her family history for a long time.

"I think I asked my first question when I was eight years old: Why we didn't have family," Comeaux-Taylor explains. "My mother got her pictures out to show me we did. I put them in an album and had her identify them. When I got older I got to know many of them."

Comeaux-Taylor was raised in Chicago because her parents, who had met in Lake Arthur, Louisiana at a roof garden ballroom, couldn't find housing in Detroit because her mother looked white.

Her parents got back on the train and headed for Chicago.

Four generations back practically all

her ancestral surnames are French — Comeaux, Girouard, Baptiste, Lorins (later Lawrence), Jacquemimn, Broussard, Chanet, and Guillaume.

Her ancestors are French, Indian, African, Jamaican, French Canadian, Ger-

"People might choose to identify me one way, but that might not be the way that I choose to identify myself," she says emphatically. "I have respect for all the cultures that are part of me and I give them equal time."

Comeaux-Taylor believes that her search for her ancestors is divinely led.

"We have a gift in our family that I don't question. I used to take the bus to the Burton Library. One day in the middle of winter, I walked up to the post office to catch the bus. It was too cold, five degrees below zero. I decided to go home. Coming out of the post office I had a spiritual visitation from my mother. She said, 'If you go today, I'll help you find what you need.' I was led to two volumes

of southwest Louisiana that I had already looked at. I found 32 names that day."

— J.W.K.



Dolores Comeaux-Taylor

man, and Irish. Yet Comeaux-Taylor finds that her identity is usually defined as African American.

I LEARNED TO SEW

by Mitsuye Yamada

How can I say this?
My child
My life is nothing.
There is nothing to tell.

My family in Japan was too poor
to send me to school
I learned to sew
always I worked to help my family
when I was seventeen years old
and no one made marriage offer
a friend in our village who was going
to Hawaii a picture bride
said to me
Come with me.

I did not want to
my parents did not want me to
my picture was sent to a stranger anyway
a young man's photograph and letter came
I was already seventeen years old
I went to the island of Hawaii to marry
this photograph.

This man came to the boat
he was too shy to talk to me
the Immigration man said to him
Here
sign here for her
He walked away
The Immigration man came to me
Don't you have relatives in Hawaii?

I said
Yes I have that man who will marry me
He said
Go back to Japan on the next boat
I said
I will wait here for my man
The Immigration man said
No
your man is not coming back
he told me he does not want you
he said you are too ugly for him
why don't you go back to Japan
on the next boat?
I said
No
I am not going back
I am staying here

Just
A minute
My child

THE WITNESS

Put that pen down
Do not write this
I never told this to anybody
Not even to my oldest son, your father
I now tell this story
To you first time in sixty years

I sat at Immigration for a long time
people came and people went
I stayed
I could not see the sky
I could not see the sun
outside the window
I saw a seaweed forest
the crickets made scraping sounds
the geckos went tuk tuk tuk
sometimes a gecko would come into my room
but I was not afraid to talk to it
it came and it went as it pleased.

I was thinking about Urashima Taro
you know the story?
Urashima disappeared into the sea
lived in the undersea world
married a beautiful princess
returned to his village
a very old man
I was thinking
I will leave this place
only when I am an old lady.

Pretty soon the Immigration man came to me
We found your cousin
In two weeks a cousin I met once
in Japan came for me
I stayed with him and his wife until
my cousin found a job for me
I worked doing housework
I did this for one year.

My cousin found a husband for me
he was a merchant
we had a small store
and sold dry goods
my husband died after three sons
your father, my oldest son was six years old
I could not keep the store
I could not read
I could not write
the only thing I knew how to do was sew.

I took cloth from our store
sewed pants and undergarments
put the garments on a wooden cart
ombu the baby on my back
we went from plantation to plantation
sold my garments to the workers
I was their only store
sewed more garments at night
I did this for five years.

Your father grew up to love study and books
my friends called him the professor
he was then eleven years old
I said to him you need a father
He said I want to go to college
I said to him I will marry any man you say
I will marry any man
who will send you to college.

One day he came home and said
I went to a matchmaker and found a husband
for you
he will marry a widow with three sons
will send them to college
he is a plantation foreman.

I married this man.

By and by my oldest son went away
to college in Honolulu
but my husband's boss told him
I need workers
your three sons must work
on my plantation like the others.
My husband said
No
He kept his word to my oldest son
and lost his job.

After that we had many hard times
I am nothing
know nothing
I only know how to sew
I now sew for my children and grandchildren
I turn to the sun every day of my life
pray to Amaterasu Omikami
for the health and
education of my children
for me that is enough

My child
Write this
There take your pen
There write it
Say that I am not going back
I am staying here.

—from *Camp Notes and Other Poems*, Kitchen
Table: Women of Color Press, Brooklyn, 1992.

Mitsuye Yamada was born in Kyushu, Japan
and raised in Seattle, Washington, until the
outbreak of World War II when her family was
removed to a Japanese concentration camp in
Idaho. She is the founder of the Multicultural
Women Writers of Orange County, California.

'Are you blood?': hope in race relations

by Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann

How many times have you heard a person of European descent say, "My family is not directly responsible for slavery or for killing the Indians"? And if they are liberal, they may add, "But I take responsibility for the actions of my race."

I have said these words myself.

But considering that most Americans can't even name their great-grandparents, how would any of us know what our ancestors may have been responsible for?

It's too convenient that we feel no personal responsibility for American history. Who do we think condemned Salem's "witches," transported slaves, fled England's jails to emigrate or planned the decimation of Indian villages? Were these people related to no one?

Many people's eyes glaze over when genealogy is the topic. But their disinterest can be rooted in a fear that their ancestors will not be honored. They may even be afraid that their ancestors participated in some atrocity or that their ancestors carry some unacknowledged blood line.

Atrocities

Two years ago I wrote in *The Witness* that I had just figured out that my Scotch Irish ancestors in southwest Pennsylvania had driven out the Lenni Lenape (Delaware) in order to be the first white land patent holders in that area.

Since then, I've discovered worse.

An ancestor of mine, Robert McCombs, was in the militia that massa-

cred 96 Moravian Indians in 1782. Nausea moved me to search out missionary David Zeisberger's journal, missionary John Heckwelder's description of the customs of the Lenni Lenape and any other histories I could find.

It seems that the Indians, having been converted by the Moravians, lived in community in the Tuscarawas Mountains, refusing to join either side of the many wars that swept over Ohio and Pennsylvania. Forced out (for the third time) by hostile European neighbors who envied their prosperity and immunity to the wars, the community staggered through a northern Ohio winter with little shelter. In the spring, the Lenni Lenape went back to the Tuscarawas to harvest the corn they'd been forced to leave in the field.

A small band of militia members told the Indians they would escort them to Fort Pitt. These "Christian Indians," who outnumbered the militia, voluntarily gave up their guns and followed. To their horror, the Indians learned they would be executed the next morning. Women and some 40 children were locked in one building, men in another. They prayed during the night and forgave one another their sins.

In the morning, they were brought into a third building where one by one their heads were smashed with a mallet. It's

reported that the mood among militia members was raucous.

I've walked through the Gnadenutten mission, prayed at the mass grave, wept by the Tuscarawas River.

I have written to the Lenni Lenape in Oklahoma looking for those who remain in Pennsylvania. I want to meet the "Delaware" who planted a peace tree at Gnadenhutten in 1992. And I want to advertise in Washington County for descendants of the militia who would like to join me in planting a tree that says we honor life and are deeply sorry.

I need to do this.

But I'm also relieved that my genealogical research progresses, because I continue to learn the history. I learn of European families killed during Indian raids in the late 1700s and of the French soldiers who joined in the torture. I have distant relatives who were killed and others taken captive. I've learned that the Lenni Lenape sometimes raided Scottish

farms and returned home via the mission, hoping to pull the Moravian Indians into the conflict.

I do not want "white guilt." And exaggerating the virtue of people my ancestors fought against will not honor them. I want to understand, with as much detail as I

Some say that anyone whose European family dates back to the 1700s in this country is likely to carry Native or African American blood.

Across the racial and ethnic divide, we often look into the faces of cousins.

can, what happened and how each side understood it. I am also researching the conditions in Scotland and in English prisons that made it seem worthwhile to my ancestors to step into ships in which many of the passengers would die and others would arrive in the Pennsylvania wilderness to fight through war after war.

In a history of the Cross Creek Presby-

Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann is editor/publisher of *The Witness*.



**Rebecca McCombs
Fleming c. 1880**

terian church, I learned that 18 members of the militia opposed the massacre — one so strongly that he had his dissent carved on his tombstone. Was my ancestor one of these?

McCombs quit the militia a year later. Did he quit in disgust? If he was, as I suspect, part Indian himself, did he participate in order to allay suspicion that he was an Indian lover?

I will continue to search. (I am astounded at the volume of data that has been preserved and I am hugely grateful to the folks that historians call “antiquarians” who keep and catalogue it.) But in the meantime I know that my flesh and blood was present when 96 men, women and children were killed. I am able to say with conviction that I am sorry, not for generic cruelty by those of European descent, but for a particular act. I am not my ancestor, but I can speak for the honor of my family.

Questions of color

A lot is being written these days about “white” not being an ethnic group. African American scholars are asking “whites” to examine when they traded off their ethnic heritage for privilege and

“whiteness.”

Others say that anyone whose European family dates back to the 1700s in this country is likely to carry Native or African American blood. Certainly many African and Native Americans carry European blood. Across the racial and ethnic divide, we often look into the faces of cousins.

Hollywood is busy presenting stories of confused identities (see reviews on page 28), while many people are making the same discovery in their



**Vinet Jane Cowen
c. 1880**



Irene Browne, 1912

own lives.

Indian Blood by Richard Pangburn (Butler Books, Kansas) is a genealogical resource that lists European and Indian blood lines that connect. The author explains that the Indian tradition of allowing white prisoners to take the place of a slain husband or brother was not just a custom, but a necessity for the tribes that were being decimated. Pangburn says that by the time the Shawnee were driven to Oklahoma, they were three-quarters white. Tecumseh himself was said to

have hazel eyes and olive skin.

Gregory Howard Williams carries two histories in his blood. Raised in white Virginia, he was taught to honor his father’s “Italian” heritage. But when his nuclear family collapsed, he and his borthor were suddenly dependent on his black grandmother in Indiana where they “learned to be niggers.” (*Life on the Color Line*, Plume, 1995).

A friend with Tennessee roots recently told me of her aunt, a 60-year-old woman steeped in white racism, who began a genealogical hunt. What she learned explained some of the “niceties” of this poor white family: the women carried a kind of aristocracy in their bones, turning down the beds at night and making fine lace. It turned out that their great-grandfather had lost a southern plantation in the aftermath of the Civil War. It also turned out that he had had two sets of children — one with his white wife and another with a black slave. All the children, together, had been moved to Tennessee. The aunt’s

great-grandmother was the slave. Voices in the shadows tormented her while she struggled to reinterpret her life.

While I search



Beatrice Wylie, 1936



Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann, 1984

through census data, burial records and early county histories, my husband notices that the people sharing the table space with me are of all races and classes. Blue collar folks in flannel shirts sit next to people dressed like blue bloods. Detroit's Burton Historical Collection contains lots of data on the Cherokees, because so many African Americans carry Cherokee blood.

Called by the grandmothers

"These days everyone wants an Indian grandmother," complains a friend.

And he's right. The trend can be fadish. If it's arrogant to fight to be listed in the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), it's no less so to look for politically correct ancestors.

But the truth is, many, many people have Indian grandmothers. So is it a New Age popularity issue or could it be something in our blood that is asking that women whose histories have been suppressed be honored?

My own interest in these questions is not only political or politically correct.

All my life, my coloring has been a confusion to me. I've loved having dark curls and olive skin, but when people asked me my nationality and I responded "Scotch Irish," they looked at me in disbelief.

I remember when I was 10 and had spent a month riding the waves in the Atlantic, my father turned to my mother and said, "We've done the impossible. We've given birth to a black child."

Eight years later, while interning at Common Cause in Washington D.C., people stopped me on the street to claim me as part of their people — surely Greek, Italian, Arabic, Jewish?

A young Indian man defending the Yellow Thunder Camp in 1981 in the Black Hills of South Dakota turned to me, "Are you blood?"

This suited me fine. As my political allegiances were developing in the 1970s

and 1980s, I was glad for a more easy passage into communities of resistance that staked their identities in non-European history.

But I felt uneasy when people did a double-take when I said, "I'm Scotch Irish." I worried that they believed I had a grandmother I would not acknowledge.

Their doubt began to work on my family mythology. All that I had been told was that on both sides I was primarily Scotch Irish and a little bit English. My mother proposed that when the Spanish Armada crashed on the banks of Ireland, they might have brought their genes into our blood line.

So I pored over photographs of people in Scotland and Ireland, looking for the "Black Irish," but I was met by blue eyes and freckles, black hair perhaps, but pale skin.

Soon I was writing to every older living distant relative I could locate. Their descendants interested me little, but the fragments of memories of the older generations, the weathered photographs, the family trees gave me a strange excitement. I started praying for my ancestors.

When I noticed that a series of children had died in an epidemic, or that a woman had been left alone with young children or that my distant uncles had died in any of America's wars, I

prayed. I believe that their pain is already resolved in the communion of saints, but I wept anyway.

When I visited Southwest Pennsylvania and searched for information about the Indians whom area histories simply referred to as "savages," it crashed over me that these pioneers on my mother's side, stretching back more than 200 years, probably did not travel with European

wives. Nor would "white" wives have been easy to find.

I was surprised to learn that there had been a lot of interaction between the Lenni Lenape and the settlers. The settlers had walked into the area on Indian foot paths. Government agents and traders boarded in Indian villages and asked permission for their work from Indian councils. Those negotiating treaties learned Indian etiquette and came to speak eloquently of the moons, the grandfathers and the buried hatchet that means peace. Women of the tribe offered to sleep with these men and sometimes married them. I do not know if these offers were voluntary or the last resort of a subjugated people. The "European" grandmothers who were given false names and even places of origin in Europe, but were not honored for their own people's gifts concern me. Their children, if they were dark enough to raise questions, were instructed to say that they were part Italian.

Rural Valley, Penn.

Under a full October moon in 1994, I drove my mother back to Rural Valley,

The actual history and the blood lines do not define reality. But Christ entered history to liberate us from something specific.

Penn., where her mother and grandmother had grown up. On my way out the door I had turned to a wall of ancestral photos and said, "Hey, I'll need your help" and grabbed a

photo of my mother's grandmother's mother, Rebecca McCombs Fleming, and her children. (My coloring seems to descend most clearly through that matrilineal line.)

In Kittaning, we found that road crews had filled all the hotels. We were steered to a Bed & Breakfast. Welcomed in, we found a marriage certificate on the wall for a Rebecca Fleming. It turned out that

my mother and our host were second cousins. The photograph I had brought showed their grandparents as children. Our host's shoe box of photos in the garage included my ancestors.

I don't have definitive answers. I know that there are Indian graves in the area and some town residents have shared stories of Indian great-grandmothers. I know some dark-skinned folks have married into the more recent Italian immigrant community. A scrap book of old photos and tin types at the local historical house shows a Scottish family, then a dark man with straight black hair playing a violin, later a mulatto man in a business suit.

Knowing that the underground railroad ran up through this area and that the Lenni Lenape populated it before the Scotch drove their way in, I sometimes hope that this isolated rural community found a way for different peoples to live in intimacy.

I'm impressed that the Presbyterian Church in Glade Run has tunnels for the underground railroad and a "well-loved" Indian student in the cemetery. And while it seems peculiar to me that my ancestors spent all their Sabbath hours in church, I respect their schools and provisions for civil war orphans. There is even something nice about their elder councils considering whether one could be readmitted to the fellowship (again) after drinking and dancing. One man had to plead forgiveness for a habit of exaggerating, a crime the community apparently took seriously.

Warp and woof

Weaving together the fragments of my ancestors lives requires attention. I'm struggling to warp with lines of families—Cowens, Flemings, McCombs, Atlees, Brownes and Carpenters, then to throw across a shuttle marking an event in our national history. How did the French Indian War, the American Revolution, the Underground Railroad, the Civil War in-



The Fleming graves in Rural Valley, Penn.

tersect with these families?

When my Pennsylvania ancestors gave federalism its first challenge in 1794, another ancestor rode from Philadelphia to suppress the Whiskey Rebellion. Also some ancestors with relatives in the south countenanced slavery, while another was an abolitionist in Cincinnati.

I struggle to see the pattern.

Is genealogical research required?

Quentin Kolb, an Ute Indian on *The Witness* board, suggests that for his people genealogy is not so important. They know who they are and to which piece of earth they belong. This piece of knowing is sufficient, particularly since it was passed on to him by his grandmother who also taught him to pray.

But when you've lost your place in land (driven out by war or famine) someone needs to take the role that the poets have played through the ages to keep the people's history alive.

Stories of the people and events that shaped a group's identity need to be retold. The poets could string these stories

together in a way that had meaning.

In America we are singularly without these stories. We have little sense of ourselves belonging to any "people," much less any imagination about what personal freedoms we might surrender to serve them.

How do the missing pieces change our story? Change our biases? Change our understanding of privilege? Change what we might be willing to do?

And most importantly, can our understanding that our ancestors were directly involved in this country's history—for better and for worse—help us to reach across racial and ethnic divides for a conversation that might be worth having? Can we participate in an accounting that may lead to reconciliation?

The actual history and the blood lines do not define reality. They are not all that there is. But Christ entered history to liberate us from something specific. In this spirit we can repent, we can be forgiven and we can speak in tongues that other communities can understand. **TW**

Invitation

by Gloria House Manana

Tampa, Florida: an ordinary birthplace in a time of world war. A beautiful young mother who would admit only her Seminole heritage. She made me question her, "From what other race come children with dark skin and hair like mine? Isn't it only the African race?" And she responded with angry silence.

Shall we recall the girlhood of our race? Shall we understand the full blossoming of our womanhood? Shall we know it when it is achieved? Shall we understand our full-grown breasts and the longing in our thighs as the longing of the race for a New Time?

Memory. If one takes its hand and follows the path of vaguely recollected sounds and smells, where will it lead? To almost forgotten secrets? To the womb, the pulsing heart, the pungent damp of earth and greenery after rain? Here is where it leads: to myself and you and away again, only to return, and in that manner accomplish the great circle of history, myth and heritage.

from *Blood River*
Broadside Press (Detroit), 1983.

'Asking for our grea

Gloria House Manana, a Witness contributing editor and English professor, interviews her cousin, Gloria Lyons, a former deputy district court administrator in Detroit.

Manana says she is interested because: "For me, the search for family history yields much more than the details of the family tree. The foreparents, whom we come to dream about as a result of hours of asking the elders and days in dusty archives, take us into a deep knowledge of the interaction and struggles of individuals and groups over the centuries. These determined spirits whose names we decipher in the historic records are somehow reborn in our own lives and come to illuminate our day-to-day actions in the world."

Gloria House Manana: What can you tell me about Lucretia Hankerson? My mother, her granddaughter, used to describe herself only as Seminole.

Gloria Hankerson Lyons: Lucretia Kimble was born in Sardis, Ga. in 1854. Her husband, Primus Hankerson, was very dark with "the skin coloring of people from India" is the way my Daddy described it. They lived in Lake City, Florida.

When I asked questions about Lucretia, the family was very secretive. My father, 85, said he didn't remember anything. My Aunt Mae, 90, told me lots of stories about Primus, but Lucretia, she said, was "just a plain old cracker." She seemed to have an attitude about her. She wouldn't answer any questions.

When I visited my father I was asking him a million questions as usual. On this particular day, he said, "Sit down. Let me give you this information and then I'm not talking about it any more because it makes me nervous."

He told me what his father had told him. Lucretia had opposite skin coloring from Primus. Her mother was Seminole and African, but her father was white. She had long blonde hair and blue eyes.

It is believed that that is why the Ku Klux Klan killed her. The story is that two white gentlemen, and I don't know that they be gentlemen, came and told Primus that they had killed his wife. They took him to her — she was all shot up.

He asked if he could get some sheets or blankets to wrap her body in. He went home and got these blankets

grandmother'

and hid a rifle under there. He went back to where they were and shot them up. He took her body and I assume the family buried her. Then he gathered his family and ran to Stark, Fla. which was about 50 miles away. I thought that was too short a distance for him to have run without being discovered, but the family members from Lake City said, "No, back then there were no roads, no transportation." He did all of that on foot with seven children.

I asked my grandfather's first cousins who lived in Ocala and they clammed up about it. Eloise said, "We understand that she died of pneumonia or something." She added, "I don't know what stories you heard but I don't want to talk about it."

G.H.M.: Why do you think people need to forget, deny or create new stories?

G.L.: I think it's shameful for them. And I think they still have a fear that the KKK would come and get them.

G.H.M.: They were taught to be silent for protection and then it became a habit? It makes me think about how the Japanese, after they were put in concentration camps in the U.S., wouldn't talk about it at all. Their children in the 1970s and 1980s were the ones who said, "What really happened?" But for them it was a

matter of pain and some shame.

G.L.: Aunt Novella was in an exceptionally good mood a few weeks ago when I called. She started talking. I didn't ask any questions because I didn't want her to clam up. She said Lucretia's father was a slave owner. He took a liking to Lucretia's mother and sold her husband off. She

terrible.

G.H.M.: As if she had any choice about her parents. Did the history make a difference to you?

G.L.: Ironically, in high school history was not an interest of mine. Now I try to picture myself back in that time and it's just terrible the way they treated us. I try

to think about what our family endured and that they had no choices.

G.H.M.: But we survived.

G.L.: It shows how strong we were. Things have changed but that undercurrent is still there. We're not equal. You can be very successful but you have to be careful because society wants to make believe that we are the inferior race. When I go to the store I don't just wear jeans because if they think you don't have money they think you must be there for something else.

G.H.M.: Is there more research that you would like to do?

G.L.: I would like to contact the white Kimbles and see if they have any records. I would like to know what Lucretia Kimble's

and Primus Hankerson's names were before. Many times the inventories of slave owners listed their names and where they came from.

G.H.M.: What has this meant to you personally, spiritually?

G.L.: Spiritually I feel God had a plan for those great-grand

children because part of us comes from every one of those people. It made us into the strong, proud people that we are. Overcomers.

TW



Lucretia Kimble's sister, great-great aunt to two Glorias.



Gloria Lyons



Gloria House Manana

worked in the slave-owner's home making beds and fluffing up their pillows. Aunt Novella said she didn't want to talk about it before because she thought it was

Going home: views on reunions

When I was growing up, Mother's Day was the day we left church early, got in our 1956 Chevrolet station wagon, and drove two hours to my grandparents' farm for the annual family reunion.

We'd arrive in the warm May sun, pull off the dirt road into the yard, and stop next to the long tables set up underneath the mimosa trees and covered with soft, slick oilcloth sheets. While the women set out platters — fried chicken, ham biscuits, green beans, chocolate cake, persimmon pudding — and shooed off kids who tried to steal a chicken leg, the men sat on the front porch talking and smoking unfiltered Camels. We kids played hide-and-seek, and new parents showed off their babies. Sunlight played hopscotch over everything, and laughter filled the air.

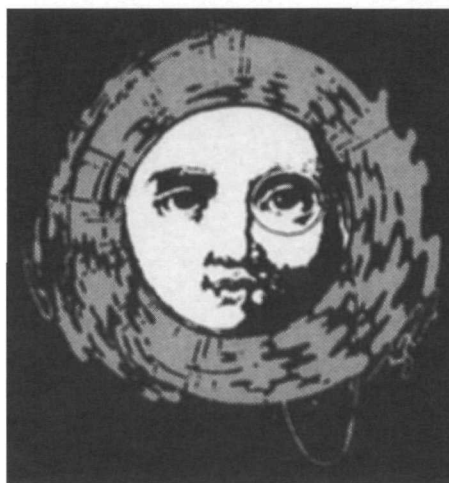
When the heat had melted the meringue on the lemon pie and the flies had figured out from which direction the rolled-up newspapers would strike, we'd all be called to dinner. Grandpa stood at the head of the longest table and said grace. Then we ate and ate, each aunt insisting we taste what she had cooked.

After dinner, as the women cleared the tables, a few of the men led us children to the family graveyard hidden deep in the woods behind the barn. It was a small plot surrounded by a low stone wall that was help together more by ivy than cement.

The graves were marked by cracked headstones bearing names like *Horace* and *Miranda* and dates from 1800 to 1925. In a small corner of the yard, a few graves had only large, unmarked stones at the head. "Those were slaves," our fathers said, and spat expertly through their teeth.

We jumped and danced around the stone wall that encircled our family laid to rest, and no one asked why the slaves' graves had no names.

Sally Whitney
Overland Park, Kansas



THE SUN

I first met my friend James' grandmother Norma when she and his mother visited from Louisiana. James had received explicit instructions from his mother to keep his homosexuality a secret from Norma. "She just wouldn't be able to handle it," James's mother had said.

As we crossed the Golden Gate Bridge on the way to Muir Woods, James commented on each male bicyclist we passed and winked at his mother, who was crouched low in the seat beside him. I sat in the back with Norma and could see

James peering into the rearview mirror as each muscular rider receded behind us.

That day James bought a redwood burl and brought it home, where he planted it in a clay pot and watered it diligently.

A year later, they visited again. This time we went to the Filoli estate, a mansion in Woodside, Calif. As we walked through the magnificent garden, James told me to distract his mother while he and Norma went off together. I paused near a beautiful bed of roses and commented to James' mother on the varieties and colors: Crimson Glory, Lavender Girl, Yellow Sunshine.

When James told Norma he was gay, she said she had already guessed. She was also correct in her fear that he had AIDS.

"When she phones now," James said several weeks later, "we discuss our illnesses. She talks about her arthritis. I talk about my opportunistic infections." Norma told James that she rubbed holy water on her hands at church and prayed that his herpes would disappear.

"Just don't let anyone see," James said.

"I rubbed a little extra on my belly," she told him.

I saw Norma again in April 1992. She and James' parents wanted to visit the place on Mount Tamalpais where we'd scattered James' ashes. Later we went to the AIDS Memorial Grove in Golden Gate Park. James' redwood tree, planted there among a grove of giant redwoods, now reached Norma's chest. A foot of new, lime-green growth rose delicately into the forest air.

We gathered around the tree for a photograph. With a sly grin that reminded me of James, Norma extended her arm toward the small tree. "My grandson," she said proudly.

Laura Siegel
Pacifica, Oregon

These vignettes are excerpted from The Sun magazine's READERS WRITE section in which readers address subjects on which they're the only authorities. Subscriptions to The Sun are available by sending \$32 to Sub. Dept., P.O. Box 3000, Denville, NJ 07834-3000. Artist Ellen Moore lives in Fredricksburg, Virginia.

As a child growing up in the New York melting pot of Elmhurst, Queens, I had the unshakable conviction that every human being was bilingual. One language was reserved for the privacy of the home (Spanish, in my case); the other — English — was for the rest of society. My peers, first- and second-generation Americans, also spoke their own “private” languages — Spanish, Polish, Italian, Yiddish, or Japanese — as well as English.

We learned English virtually by osmosis. It was English that we heard on Saturday-morning Bugs Bunny cartoons and on “The Ed Sullivan Show,” English that was spoken by the Mr. Softee ice-cream truck driver and the soft-pretzel vendor on the corner, English that was whispered by Santa Claus at the Macy’s toy department as we sat on his lap. By kindergarten we had mastered the language, while many of our immigrant parents were still struggling through night classes in English as a second language.

In the 1970s my family relocated to all-American, middle-class Willingboro, N.J., a suburb of Philadelphia. Here there were no more “private” languages, except for ours.

Today, at our family reunions, my parents speak to my seven-year-old and six-month-old sons in Spanish. More often than not, my older son responds in English. Yet, he is gradually learning the language of my childhood — as if by osmosis — from the conversations of his loving grandparents.

*Susana Rosende Gillotti
Orlando, Florida*

I was standing in the snow at the edge of the driveway waiting for Jamie. We had agreed to meet that morning at 10:45 and she was late. Heavy snowfall the night before had made the roads treacherous, and I paced back and forth, checking my watch and strain-



Extended families in L.A.

Donna DeCesare/Impact Visuals

ing to see the cars inching up the winding, hilly road.

Jamie was three days old when I gave her up for adoption. Now, four months shy of her nineteenth birthday, we were reuniting. We’d both begun looking for each other on her eighteenth birthday. A data-bank search registry had finally matched us just five days ago, and we had decided to meet at the home of my good friends, who happened to live just ten minutes from the house where Jamie had grown up.

Again I looked at my watch. Jamie was more than half an hour late now. Remembering how I’d barely made it up the incline a half mile down the road, I got behind the wheel of my car and began driving slowly down the icy street. I knew that she could drive right past me and I wouldn’t know it, but I had to try. Two cars passed and I peered into them. After a mile — and three more cars — another vehicle approached. Once more I strained my eyes. Behind the wheel was a young woman. She looked straight into my eyes.

My eyes. She had my eyes. We both slammed on our brakes, then stared at each other through the snow and soot on our windshields. The next thing I knew, we were out of our cars and skidding on the ice trying to get to each other. We collided into each other’s arms. “Are you —?” she asked. “Yes,” I answered. “I am.”

*Victoria Gallucci
Brooklyn, New York*

No way was I going. My Dad must have been kidding. Spend four hours in a hot car, forced to listen to country music, while Dad criticizes every life choice I’ve made? And do all this to go to his family reunion? Not me.

Ever since Mom died, things had been difficult between Dad and me. Without mother as our shock absorber, the two of us were like bumper cars haphazardly ramming into one another, leaving irreparable dents.

He was putting on the hard sell for this

reunion: pleading, mailing personal letters to my two brothers and me six months in advance so we could put the event on our calendars. *Right, Dad. I'm busy. I don't know your side of the family. I didn't even know you had a sister until three years ago. They're all strangers to me, just like you.*

Two weeks before the reunion, my little brother called. He'd buckled under the pressure. So had my older brother. I gave in.

As we piled into his car, Dad directed us on where to sit and how to act, lecturing us on his rules of the road. I immediately defied one of his rules and opened a bottle of pop and a bag of chips. My brothers looked on in disbelief, pleading with me not to start so soon. There was an awkward silence in the car when we pulled out.

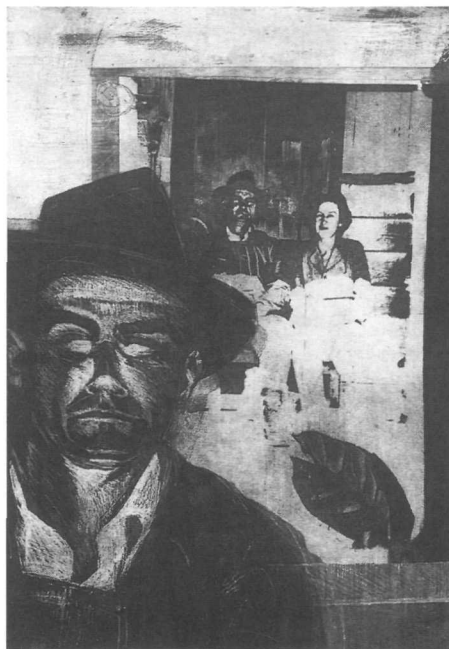
We hadn't been together for an outing in years, and all of us were still hurting from Mom's death. Somewhere during her ordeal, we had lost each other. As the miles passed, we stumbled in and out of conversations, forcing ourselves to break the silence that should have been filled by Mom's voice. I brought up one of our horrendous family vacations, and even Dad began to smile. I studied his face — who was this man?

We were the first to arrive at the park. While Dad waited for other relatives to show up, my brothers and I decided to "check things out" —

our code for getting away from Dad. We walked in silence awhile; then, for the first time, we spoke

of Mom. Now, two years after her death, we were trying to see what had survived. Whose reunion was this, anyway?

The dinner bell clanged, and we headed back to the gathering. Dad waved us over to the center table he had been saving and introduced us to his relatives. Again I



Ellen Moore

studied his face as he bragged about our various achievements. He looked so proud, distinguished. Loading up the car to go home, I drew a huge sigh of relief; there had been no arguments, no fights, no tears.

As the miles passed by, Dad and I talked about the people I had met that afternoon. Who was this sister of his, and why had she been such a secret? My dad told a tale of poverty, heartache, risky adoption, and courage. He looked vulnerable and afraid as he poured out this painful part of his history to me. A com-

*I drew a huge sigh of relief;
there had been no arguments,
no fights, no tears.*

fortable quiet filled the car. I cranked down the window to breathe some fresh air and laid my head against the door. Dad popped in his favorite country-hits cassette.

The humming began, soft and low. Was that my foot tapping, my lips forming the words "You picked a fine time to leave me, Lucille"? Gaining confidence, my brothers in the back seat joined Dad

and me in harmony. We were trying to find our voices once again.

Mary J. Cushman
River Falls, Wisconsin

was the first of four children. My parents looked to me to set an example for the younger kids. My father fashioned an adult-apprenticeship program for me, assigning me certain chores around the house, for which I was paid an allowance. I was also expected to get good grades in school and monitor my younger siblings.

I was enthusiastic about keeping an eye on my siblings. I took to it like a seasoned fascist, cultivating a stiff, authoritarian manner, bossing them around indiscriminately, just like my father.

My siblings all resented my new role — none more than my sister Arden, who was only eighteen months younger than I. Arden and I fought viciously.

When I reached high school, I was accepted to a private boys' boarding school in a distant part of the state — the same school my father and his two brothers had attended. While I was there, I lost touch with my sister; she was like a stranger when I came home for the holidays.

One day toward the end of my second year, I was called to the headmaster's office. He told me he knew that I was growing marijuana. I was expelled.

My dad picked me up at the airport. I don't think he said a word to me on the way home, but he drove very fast. When we got home, my mom was in her bedroom crying, her eyes the color of cranberries. I went upstairs to Arden's room. My sister was surprised to see me — she hadn't heard yet. As I told her what had happened, she looked at me with incredible sympathy. "I'm glad you're back," she said.

E. Perrin Bucklin
Albuquerque, New Mexico

Righter no heretic, court rules; accusers vow G. C. showdown

by Julie A. Wortman

By a majority of seven to one, an ecclesiastical court of white male Episcopal Church bishops ruled on May 15 that retired bishop Walter Righter did not commit "heresy" when he ordained Barry Stopfel, a partnered gay man, while Righter was serving as assistant bishop in the Diocese of Newark in 1990.

Two conservative bishops on the panel opposed to the ordination of non-celibate gay men and lesbians, Roger White of Milwaukee and Donis Patterson, retired bishop of Dallas, sided with the majority opinion that Righter had not violated any "core doctrine" in ordaining Stopfel or in signing a statement supporting such ordinations in 1994. A third conservative bishop, Andrew Fairfield of North Dakota, issued a dissenting opinion arguing that a 1979 General Convention resolution [see *Witness* 4/96] recommendation that it was "not appropriate" to ordain non-celibate homosexuals carried doctrinal weight. Under fire from Righter's accusers for having approved the ordination of a non-celibate gay man last January, court member Frederick H. Borsch of Los Angeles, did not cast a vote.

Although they said they had grounds for challenging the ruling, the 10 male bishops who brought the charges against Righter said they would instead focus on persuading the 1997 General Convention to issue a ban on the ordination of persons who engage in sexual relations outside of heterosexual marriage.

In a May 28 statement responding to the court's decision they said they would create "a fellowship" of Episcopal parishes and dioceses committed to their position and called upon like-minded church members "to join us in repentance for our past inattention and inaction in teaching,

proclaiming and upholding the apostolic and catholic faith" and "to direct their personal resources, as a matter of stewardship, to those ministries that proclaim the historic and biblical Christian Faith."

The ruling

In its 27-page decision the ecclesiastical court emphasized that it was not "giving an opinion on the morality of same-gender relationships" or "deciding whether life-long committed, same-gender sexual relationships are or are not a wholesome example with respect to ordination vows" or offering an opinion on whether dioceses should ordain partnered homosexuals.

"Rather, we are deciding the narrow issue of whether or not under Title IV [of the church's canons] a bishop is restrained from ordaining persons living in committed same-gender sexual relationships," the court said.

The only doctrine affected by Title IV, the court said, was its unchangeable "core doctrine," something less extensive than Righter's accusers claimed.

Kerygma and didache

"The Court holds to the ancient distinction between the Core Doctrine which is derived from the Gospel preaching, *kerygma*, and the Church's teaching, *didache*, of those things necessary for our life in community and the world," the ruling stated.

"The *kerygma* is found in the life and teaching of Jesus and the preaching and evangelistic action of the church revealed in the New Testament and other early Christian documents."

Citing C.H. Dodd's 1936 *The Apostolic Preaching*, the court listed the "basic contents" of the *kerygma* as: "God in Christ fulfills the scripture. God became

incarnate in Jesus Christ. Christ was crucified. Christ was buried. Christ rose again. Christ was exalted to God. God gave us the gift of the Holy Spirit. There will be a day of judgment. Therefore repent."

The court said the church's core doctrine is to be found in the Book of Common Prayer and in the creeds, adding that the church's doctrine is "not found but rather grounded in Holy Scripture. Holy Scripture is the story of our relationship to God. It is not at heart a rule book of doctrine or discipline."

The ordination of non-celibate homosexuals, the court ruled, was not a matter of doctrine in the "core" sense. However, it might be a matter of *didache* or "communally authoritative teachings regarding belief and practice that are considered essential to the identity and welfare" of the church. "Some doctrinal teachings of the Church have been found to be so important to the ordering of the life of the Church that they have been made mandatory, with disciplinary consequences defined in canon law for failure to conform," the court said, but "no such written constraint is contained in the Canons that forbids the ordination of persons because of homosexuality, in orientation or practice."

Period of indecision

The court did suggest that it might be possible to discipline a bishop in cases where a doctrinal teaching "has not been seriously questioned or challenged," but "at this time the Church, in spite of its reaffirmations of traditional teaching, is in a period of

Holy Scripture is the story of our relationship to God. It is not at heart a rule book of doctrine or discipline.

— the opinion of the Court

Julie A. Wortman is managing editor of *The Witness*.



Fital Signs

indecision with respect to its moral doctrine concerning same-gender relationships and we do not find sufficient clarity in the Church's teaching at the present time concerning the morality of same-sex relationships to hold that ordination of a non-celibate homosexual person violates a bishop's ordination vow to uphold the discipline of the Church."

Only the church's General Convention, not its bishops acting unilaterally, can establish a doctrinal teaching that has disciplinary repercussions, the court said.

On a "pastoral" note, the court reminded the church "that this issue will not be resolved and the Church unified in its faith and practice by presentments and trials, nor by unilateral acts of bishops and their dioceses, or through the adoption of proclamations by groups of bishops or others expressing positions on the issues."

Separate opinion

In a separate opinion, White and Patterson said that while they agreed, technically, with the majority, they found no support for ordaining partnered homosexuals in Scripture, or in teachings accepted by the corporate church or in the Book of Common Prayer. They called ordinations such as Righter's ordination of Stopfel "presumptive and preemptive."

"Such individual action by a bishop or a diocese can only threaten the unity of the church and question the nature of the church itself," White and Patterson said. "For unity is critical for God's mission and it is to that mission that we are called and must attend."

Diverse Reactions

Predictably, reactions to the ruling abounded. The following suggests the range and passion of views expressed:

NOW IS THE TIME for mutual reconciliation and healing. Integrity, Inc., the lesbian and gay justice ministry of the Episcopal Church, is deeply grateful that the Church has listened to the Holy Spirit and has reaffirmed the inclusivity of the Gospel. The judgment also reaffirms the historical inclusivity of Anglicanism.

The decision to dismiss the charges

against the Rt. Rev. Walter Righter for both alleged heresy and his alleged violation of his ordination vows is amply supported by the Canons of the Episcopal Church. We rejoice with Bishop Righter and his wife Nancy, long-time Integrity members, who have borne the pain of these charges at heavy personal price. We rejoice with the Rev. Barry Stopfel, also an Integrity member, and his partner, Will Lecke, who have faced the charges in a more personal way but collectively with hundreds of other lesbian and gay Episcopal priests. We rejoice with the Episcopal Church, and hope that the decision will aid in evangelism by our church, not only in the lesbian and gay community, but in the broader community as well, especially among the young, who long to see a loving church reaching out to their complex world.

The church is now in a position to fully embrace the ministry of its lesbian and gay clergy.

We reaffirm our support for historical Anglican inclusiveness — a church that allows a diversity of opinion — and we hope that we will be able to continue in mutual ministry with those who have opposed us. There is so much more that unites than divides us. — **Integrity**

BY DISREGARDING the Church's doctrine of marriage, this court has condemned the Episcopal Church to still more anarchy and conflict.

This ruling is a tacit validation of homosexuality. Both Holy Scripture and The Book of Common Prayer clearly teach the doctrine that Christians are to reserve sexual intimacy for the sacrament of marriage. The practice of homosexuality is a flagrant violation of this long held Christian belief. The Episcopal Church cannot abandon this essential doctrine without wreaking havoc in the lives of its members. The court did not have authority to change the Church's teaching and their action serves as further evidence that the bishops are out of touch with both the Church universal and the overwhelming majority of faithful Episcopalians. In declaring that the Church has no basis

under Title 4 to restrain a bishop from ordaining a practicing homosexual, they have loosed a prescription for ecclesiastical chaos.

Some may believe that this acquittal of Bishop Righter spares the Episcopal Church bad publicity regarding a so-called heresy trial. The fallout from this disastrous ruling will be far worse than bad publicity.

Now that the door has been opened for the Episcopal Church to deny the sanctity of marriage, on what basis will it ask priests or laity to honor the sanctity of marriage?

Episcopalians will remember this ruling when they choose where to devote their energies and their finances. With this ruling, the Episcopal Church as a national entity will continue to fragment and devolve.

— **Todd Wetzel, executive director of Episcopalians United**

THE EPISCOPAL WOMEN'S CAUCUS rejoices at the decision rendered by the Court for the Trial of a Bishop in dismissing both charges against retired Bishop Walter C. Righter. We especially rejoice with our lesbian sisters and gay brothers in this affirmation of the gift of their ministries in our Church.

The decision expressed in the Opinion of the Court not only clarifies what constitutes the core doctrine of our Church, but also reaffirms the essential faith claims of Christianity. We believe those faith claims free us to proclaim that the Gospel message is an inclusive message.

We give thanks that the Church is not now compelled to drive out large numbers of faithful and effective clergy who are lesbian and gay along with the bishops who ordained them. God calls human beings to God's service, and the Church ordains human beings, not categories. This decision brings us one step closer to a whole priesthood, to the time when all of us can fully live out the Baptismal invitation to live as part of Christ's eternal priesthood.

The Court's Opinion clarifies an important distinction about when use of the presentment process is appropriate.

In its Opinion, in Section III.E, the Court writes: "Some doctrinal teachings of the Church have been found to be so important to the ordering of the life of the Church that they have been made mandatory, with disciplinary consequences defined in canon law for failure to conform. Some of these understandings, as for example what constitutes eligibility for ordination, are incorporated in the constraints found in Title III of the Canons concerning age, gender, and prior ordination, and which are binding upon bishops, standing committees, commissions on ministry, vestries and presbyters." [Emphasis added]

"No such written constraint is contained in the Canons," the Court continues, that would forbid "the ordination of persons because of homosexuality, in orientation or practice."

This clarifies something often overlooked in recent heated debates: that there are two parallel struggles ongoing in the Church — the ordination of women and the ordination of non-celibate gay and lesbian persons. While the presentment process is not appropriate to resolve situations in which neither doctrine nor canon exist, it can be appropriate in matters which General Convention, as the legislative body of the Church, has codified in canons which carry disciplinary consequences, such as the eligibility of women for ordination to the priesthood and episcopate.

As we work through these issues in General Convention in 1997, we pray that the Church will continue to interpret received history, moral tradition and Biblical texts in light of the principles of fundamental human value and equality as expressed in our Baptismal Covenant when we promise, with God's help, "to strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being." The Church cannot be fully human or fully reflect the image of God without all of God's people.

Former Caucus president, the Rev. Carol Cole Flanagan, perhaps best characterized the impact of the Court's decision when she said, "The Church has

always acted its way into new ways of thinking. It has never thought its way into new ways of acting."

— Episcopal Women's Caucus

THIS IS NOT A QUESTION OF civil rights on the one hand, or prejudice against gays and lesbians on the other. Of course homosexual persons need the love and care of the Christian community! Of course they are to be treated with respect and compassion!

Our Diocesan Board has spent much time considering what would constitute the Episcopal Church's "abandonment of its own teaching," and what action should be taken by this diocese, should that occur. On May 23 the Board determined that the decision of this Court is indeed an official pronouncement of the Episcopal Church, and that pronouncement constitutes the abandonment of orthodox, biblical and traditional Christian teaching. The Board voted (with one dissent) to act



Press crowd around Walter Righter and his wife, Nancy, moments after the Court for the Trial of a Bishop announced its decision to dismiss charges against Righter. James Solheim/ENS

What concerns Episcopalians and other Christians today is the brand-new argument that openly homosexual individuals should be ordained, while living with their sexual partners in the rectory in an entirely new kind of role modeling.

... Knowing [that the exoneration of Bishop Righter] was a possible outcome of the presentment process, our Diocesan Convention voted back in January to attach a "Letter of Conscience" to our pledge to the National Church of this calendar year. In it we said, "Should the Episcopal Church abandon its own teaching we will, in conscience, be required to reconsider or rescind our pledge."

in accordance with our Letter of Conscience sent to the Presiding Bishop and the Treasurer of the Episcopal Church on February 5, 1996.

Prior to the General Convention of 1994 there was a clear distinction between two different parts of the "asking" of the National Church to each of its dioceses. The *Assessment* supported the General Convention itself, and the office of the Presiding Bishop and his staff. The *Apportionment* then funded the programs of the National Church that were authorized by the General Convention of the coming Triennium. The *Assessment* has always been considered "mandatory," i.e. the dues each diocese pays for being

a part of the Episcopal Church USA, while the *Apportionment* was truly an “asking.” Dr. John Booty, the chief historiographer of the Episcopal Church, wrote back in 1979, concerning this *Apportionment* “Program Budget:” “Dioceses and parishes can indicate their approval or disapproval of [the Church’s] policies and activities by giving or withholding the money necessary for its work. At crucial moments ordinary people in parishes are able to exert their power in telling ways, indicating that they of the holy community provide the basis upon which all else exists.”

In 1994 the two sections of the National Church’s budget were combined into a single “asking,” (which the President of the House of Deputies considers to now be entirely voluntary). They are, however, still separate in the canons, and distinguishable from each other in the formula behind the “combined asking.” The math is a bit complicated, but it works out as follows: The *Assessment* portion of the National Church’s asking — that is, the “dues,” the mandatory portion of the asking for this diocese \$43,000 — is for this current year. The *Apportionment* — that is, the historically voluntary portion of the National Church’s asking — is \$164,000. At its May 23 meeting the Diocesan Board voted to:

- pay the *Assessment* in full for the present year (actually, we have already paid more than that amount in the first five monthly installments on our pledge), and
- redirect the balance of the *Apportionment* (approximately \$100,000 remaining) to be divided equally between the Diocese of Honduras (our companion diocese of long standing) and the Great Commission Alliance, a new umbrella organization that works to spread the gospel and plant churches through the South American Missionary Society, the North American Missionary Society, and Anglican Frontier Missions, which is dedicated to planting churches among 25 of the most neglected and least evangelized peoples today.

The official name of the Episcopal Church is “The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society.” That name ought to

be descriptive of the mission and ministry of the Episcopal Church, but we believe its mission and ministry have been diverted in a direction we cannot support. Thus, we propose to redirect the *Apportionment* monies from this diocese to agencies that will more faithfully carry out both the domestic and the foreign mission and ministries we are called to support.

It was the sentiment of the Board that this action should be a clear sign of our desire to remain loyal to the historic teaching of the Episcopal Church, our continuing desire to be a diocese in good standing in this branch of Christ’s church, and at the same time a clear protest against the Court’s decision. We believe that decision constitutes the abandonment of historic, biblical and Anglican orthodoxy, the authentic “Core Doctrine” of our heritage.

If any congregation dissents from the decision of the Bishop and the board, the vestry is invited to request that the *Apportionment* monies from that congregation continue to be sent to the National Church, and this office will implement that request. It is my fervent hope, however, that we will be united in this important witness.

**— Excerpted from a June 2
pastoral letter from presenter John
Howe to his diocese (Cen. Fla.).**

WE EPISCOPALIANS, we Anglicans, are not fundamentalists. By that I mean that we have not and are not likely ever to read the Bible only in a literal sense. For us Scripture is foundational, it underlies everything we believe. It informs our praying and our thinking today. We go for the essence, and part of that essence, as we see it in the Incarnation of God in Christ, is liberality of love.

That is also what gets us into trouble. For in every place, in every generation, that experience of incarnational liberality has caused us to open our hearts, our minds, whatever is closed in us, to consider some one or ones who are the lepers of that day in a new light, to seek and serve the Christ in them. And whatever the new nudgings, those of us in the fold

at that time will begin to argue whether or not those someones have the Christ in them, whether their beings or their behaviors are sinful, whether that liberality of love is intended by God for them. And intended, mind you, through us. It would be all right if God could find some nice way to do it without dragging us into it, but things do not usually work that way. For one, very few human beings (if any), can dare to believe the Christ is in them unless some very human others let them see their reflections in our eyes. For another, when any one or many of us stop seeking the Christ in others, we lose sight of it in ourselves. Like it or not, that is part of the economy of God’s creation.

This liberality of love, this daringly incarnational living, when central to our mission, has always gotten us Episcopalians, us Anglicans, into trouble with each other and with the world. The Civil War, the anti-racism struggles of the 1950s and 1960s, the role of women in the councils of the Church in the 1960s and the ordination of women scarcely more than two decades ago are all matters and events which called up everything in us, from our deepest fears to our grandest hopes. And we had trouble loving one another. Unless we change the emphasis in our theology, that is, unless we give up on this radical doctrine of Incarnation, this outrageous confidence in God’s loving, we shall have new disagreements from time to time—each time we are nudged to consider loving and serving the Christ in someone(s) we have never loved and served before.

My prayer is that we may, in response to this decision of the ecclesiastical court, move beyond what my mentor John Krumm calls this “blessed rage for order,” and instead live into the longing to be of one heart. When God gives us the gift to be of one heart, we can agree and disagree, we can fight and argue, we can do all sorts of things without causing even deeper wounds in our passion for truth or justice.

**— Excerpted from a message to
his diocese from James Jelinek
(Minn.), a bishop opposed to the trial.**

Family on the silver screen

by Bill Wylie-Kellermann

To the extent that Hollywood movies are any measure, family history is on the American cultural mind. There are in release this past year a number of films on the topic.

The best of them is *My Family, Mi Familia*. Set in East L.A., it spans four generations, beginning with the old man "born in Los Angeles when it was still Mexico." The story is carried forward on the strength of five marriages. The first involves the "Jefe," who walked north for a year and crossed the bridge from East L.A. to take a lawn job at a wealthy home, there to fall in love with another servant and raise their children through the deportation horrors of the Depression.

Then the marriages of their children: one daughter in a huge East L.A. fiesta, another as a nun to a priest while both are doing solidarity work, and yet another arranged by those two between her brother and a *compañera* to prevent her deportation to Salvador. Lastly, the lawyer son who sheepishly brings his gringo fiancé and her parents on a visit back to the *barrio*. For him, the old Mexican is not buried in the backyard beneath the plot of beans and corn. He waves off the suggestion quickly as the quirky quaintness of "an old family story."

All this, including a shooting by the police, transpires beneath the bridge from East L.A. which hovers mythically over all, confirming and spanning the great cultural, economic divide.

The film is full of struggle, weaving history and family in a narrative voiced by the middle brother who proves to be the writer. It's all well acted, especially

Bill Wylie-Kellermann is a Methodist pastor and author of *Seasons of Faith and Conscience* (Orbis, 1991).

by Jimmy Smits who manages not to overshadow.

In another "burial" and reunion, Robert Duvall plays an Arkansas farm equipment salesman who discovers that his real mother was African American and sets off to locate his half-brother (James Earl Jones) in *A Family Thing*.

Crossing that family divide is no small task — the American crisis writ fine — and the fact that in the end they pull off the meeting of hearts (without undue sentimental manipulation) makes this a truly hopeful film. Duvall and Jones both can act and do. The story has an easy southern pacing into which one may relax.

Flirting with Disaster casts the family search and reunion motif as a comic road movie. Ben Stiller, a yuppie entering fatherhood, is suddenly urgent to locate his birth parents, having been adopted quite young. He gathers up his wife (Patricia Arquette) and the kid, accompanied by a inept adoption agency bureaucrat, to undertake the cross-country hunt, complete with false leads and sight gags.

Mary Tyler Moore and George Segal play the neurotic adoptive parents, anxious about this whole endeavor, while Lily Tomlin and Alan Alda wait at the end of the road as the biological parents — aging hippies who also prove devious cons.

Another comedy, directed by Jodie Foster, is built around the annual family trek back for Thanksgiving. *Home for the Holidays* puts Holly Hunter at the table with her parents (Anne Bancroft and

Charles Durning) and assorted other family members, kookie and straight.

Around that table, old patterns kick in and old wounds surface, so the humor is full of snipes and petty cruelties, like the fun of being crammed close into a telephone booth. When Hunter asserts, "We don't have to like one another, we're family," it's part of a plea for love. Robert Downey, Jr., the gay son, slips away to call his partner at a serene seaside party elsewhere and asks, "How's my real family?" In the end, however, mostly, the excruciations do resolve in love.

Finally, in *How to Make an American Quilt*, the most impressively casted of the lot, Wynona Ryder has gone home for the summer to write her thesis on women's tribal culture and brood on a marriage proposal while a southern quilting bee of family and friends stitches her wedding present. Among others around the quilting rack are Anne Bancroft, Ellen Burstyn, and Alfre Woodard. Each square is a narrative window flashing back personal stories

of love and loss which each edify Ryder's decision. Maya Angelou, the former servant girl with an illegitimate mulatto daughter (Woodard), appropriately orchestrates the project with deep wisdom and artistic aplomb. The film is an ambitious and complex

narrative fabric, hinting the richness of American family history itself. **TW**

In *Home for the Holidays*, old patterns kick in. When Holly Hunter asserts, "We don't have to like one another, we're family." it's a plea for love.

review

Children who behave in disrespectful ways are “acting like they have no family,” according to a Native American saying. Nancy Wanshon, a Detroit-area genealogical researcher of Odawa heritage, would apply this critique to the dominant American culture.

“I feel very sorry for Americans, because they have no identity,” Wanshon says. “Culture is where morals and values come from. I don’t believe in this big melting pot — I think it is important for all people to know who they are and where they come from.”

Such knowledge may be prized most highly by those who have been forcibly deprived of it. Wanshon’s mother, like many Native Americans of her generation, was separated from her family by a government intent on “civilizing” Indian children. Taken from her northern Michigan family at the age of three, she was placed first in a Wisconsin orphanage, then in a series of rural foster care homes.

“They would teach children to forget about being Indian, and wouldn’t let them know where their families were,” Wanshon says.

When her mother was released from state custody at the age of 16, she began to search for her relatives. On the advice of an Indian who recognized her name, she moved to Michigan, but never accomplished a reunion. Though she married a German man, she instilled a strong sense of Indian identity in their children.

Many Indian people were not being accepted because they didn’t have tribal membership certification.



Nancy Wanshon

Searching for Indian records

by Marianne Arbogast

“I grew up knowing I was Indian and was very proud of it,” Wanshon says. “We never watched cowboy and Indian movies, and when we saw a Hollywood version of Indians, my mother would clarify it.

“I’ve often wondered how she was able to maintain her self-pride. I think she was abused so badly by the orphanage and foster homes that she was determined not to be like those people.”

Although her mother obtained some family records after a law was enacted mandating their release, they were burned after her death by inlaws who were embarrassed by their brother’s marriage. When Wanshon applied to university in her mid-20s, she had to compile the records from scratch to prove blood quantum for a tuition waiver.

“In college I got very involved in Native politics,” Wanshon says. “AIM [the American Indian Movement] helped me

to recognize what was happening to the earth and our people.”

One of her discoveries was that many Native Americans who wanted to go to college were having problems verifying their identity. She also noted the discrepancy between official census reports and unofficial Indian awareness of their numbers.

“Many Indian people were being counted as white, and many Indians were not being accepted because they didn’t have tribal membership certification,” she says.

Realizing that she had learned how to access information that many did not have, Wanshon began to help others trace their lineage.

She had a copy of the Durant Roll, a 1910 Michigan census of Indian communities, and knew that similar lists existed in other states. She knew how to obtain copies of census field notes and older

*Witnesses,
the quick and the dead*

Marianne Arbogast is assistant editor of *The Witness*.

annuity payrolls — “proof of the theft of Indian land” — from the National Archives. She keeps a copy of an 1870 payroll which lists her great-grandfather among those who lost their land through government extortion.

Two years ago, at an Indian genealogical conference, she overheard a young girl telling one of the speakers that she was trying to locate a relative.

Wanshon realized that the girl's lost great-aunt was her own mother. She embraced her cousin, relieved to learn that her mother's family had never stopped looking for her.

In one of her frequent trips to Indian gatherings in northern Michigan, Wanshon met an elder who had known her grandfather. She learned that he and her grandmother, who spoke no English, had been married in a traditional Native ceremony, and refused to give in to incentives to be married in church.

“The church would register the birth of a Native child and give the family food and clothing if they would have that child baptized,” Wanshon says.

“The community was poor and malnourished. My grandparents had 10 children, and they allowed the last six to be baptized. On each baptismal record the church would write ‘illegitimate.’ But they wouldn't take a can of beans or a blanket and allow the church to marry them; they felt their marriage was blessed by the Creator and didn't need any other blessing.”

Wanshon also learned that her grandfather, who sometimes traveled great distances to find work, always sent money back home.

“Indian people were very communal,” she says. “They worked to make life better for the whole community. Things like that make me proud of who I am and where I come from.”

She is equally proud of her traditional faith, which she distinguishes from the

“Sunday religion” of mainstream America.

“We live our spirituality every day,” Wanshon says. “We know that when we do something good for one another, that is part of spirituality. At any time, we can burn some sage and pray, and the burning of sage and sweet grass takes our prayer up to the Creator.”

Wanshon participates in sacred fire ceremonies, listening to the teachings of Indian elders, and ghost suppers, in which plates are set for the dead. She looks forward to reunion with her ancestors after death.

Wanshon's people, the Little Traverse Bay Band of Odawa Indians, won federal recognition in 1994, after some 200 years of struggle. This status allows them to establish an independent system of government in their homeland, in the Petoskey-Charlevoix area of Michigan.

“We know we have been here from time immemorial, but we had to prove that our people were here before European Americans, and existed as a legitimate governing body,” Wanshon explains. She traveled north in September of 1994 for the Reaffirmation of her people's sovereignty.

Though Wanshon remembers her father's German immigrant parents with fondness, they were “eager to get involved in the melting pot, and just become American,” she says with regret. In one corner of her dining room hangs a cuckoo clock — a reminder of a clock brought from the Black Forest by her paternal grandparents. It is surrounded by an abundance of Native symbols and images.

Wanshon also carries sweet grass and other Native objects in her car, and takes care to drive with extreme courtesy. She hopes that people will notice, and that her graciousness will reflect well on the Indian community. She knows she has a family. **TW**

Back Issues

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I am finally alone. They flew in from all directions like a flock of geese. There was a great commotion, much chattering and fluttering, people scattered about the yard like confetti, the laughter rising from them like bright balloons. The summer night fell slowly, bringing just the slightest relief from the heat of day. Then, one by one, they began to leave. Everyone had to be hugged one more time, the last few pictures snapped against the fading light.

This is how healing works. It is not always as dramatic as a surgeon's incision or the laying-on of hands. Sometimes it is as simple as feeding people, seeing two relatives talking in a corner, or holding the newest baby cousin and remembering holding his mother.

— Trish Hanly
St. Helena, California

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