

DIRECTOR'S DESK

2008 is our 20th anniversary year. On June 27-29 some 2,400 people saw Joanna's King's riveting play about the life of young Dirk Willems. History indicates his age as between 15 and 20 years old. She entitled the play, **The Moment of Truth**. There is a powerful moment toward the end of the play where Dirk Willems' pursuer is in the icy water and about to drown. Dirk has safely crossed the thinly covered iced lake. All he has to do is continue to run and he will again be a free man. Dirk and his pursuer are frozen in place while Dirk hears all the reasons why he should escape and allow the wretched Anabaptist pursuer to drown. But another voice cascades across the stage and audience: **"Love your enemy, do good to those who hate you..."**

As a teenager I still vividly recall the period in my life where I needed to decide which group I would spend my time with. I could be part of the church youth group that was involved in decent and up building character molding activities or I could be part of the carousing drinking bunch. I experimented with both groups. However, there was for me *the moment of truth*. I needed to leave my old drinking friends and find better companions. Sad but true, some of my friends have had a very difficult time with alcoholism and total mismanagement of their life and finances. At the same time, by the grace of God I have had a life of wonderful experiences.

Many of our Amish and Mennonite young people struggle with these very issues. Many youth feel that in order to belong they have to be part of the "party scene." Under the influence of alcohol and drugs many young people have made poor judgments that have had life time consequences. Things like unwanted pregnancies, abortions, and addictions to drugs and alcohol bring much pain and misery to individuals, family and Christian communities.

I still recall a number of adults who encouraged or challenged me in those trying years. Are there youth that need your love and understanding in those difficult growing up years?

—Joseph Yoder



MENNO-HOF

AMISH-MENNONITE VISITORS' CENTER

P.O. Box 701

Shipshewana, Indiana 46565

*See and Hear
the Amish-Mennonite Story*

VISITOR COMMENTS

"Very interesting to learn more about Amish and Mennonites as a faith community."

"This gave me a better understanding of my own personal beliefs and how history affected those beliefs."

Visitors:

**January – June '08
9,006**

**May '88 – June '08
789,058**

Reunion is published quarterly to keep our friends informed of happenings at Menno-Hof. Direct questions or comments to Joseph Yoder, director, at jjyoder@mennohof.org

Menno-Hof Amish-Mennonite Visitors' Center

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The Menno-Hof Newsletter

reunion

Vol. 17–No. 4 Summer 2008

Here in this place: A story of Mennonite-Muslim relationships

By Elizabeth Stauffer

"Here, in this place, with 12 others, on August 8th, 1882, I received Holy Baptism through Elder Johann Jantzen. Therefore, this place where on my knees the covenant with my God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, was sealed, where I received such stimulation for my inner life, which had a decisive influence on my whole life, showing me the way,—will continually live in my memory."

On June 3, 2008 I read the above from my grandfather's memoirs while standing in that unlikely place—a small mosque in Serabulak, Uzbekistan. Beside me were H. A. and Tim Penner, great-grandsons of Johann Jantzen who baptized my grandfather Jacob Klaassen on that day in 1882. That place will now also live in my memory.

My Russian Mennonite ancestors, like many Mennonites of earlier centuries, were people on the move, starting in the Netherlands, moving across northern Europe to West Prussia (what is now Poland) then to Russia. In each case, the move happened because restrictions were being placed on their way of life, including the withdrawal of exemption from military service.

Many Russian Mennonites immigrated to North America in the 1870s; others, including my ancestors, were drawn to the East. In the summers of 1880 and '81, five different groups, approximately 200 families in all, undertook a trek by horse and wagon from their home in Russia to Central Asia. They had sent scouts to survey the situation, and did have assurances of land and religious freedom, but in truth knew little of the circumstances they would face.

Early on, a large group settled in the Talas Valley in present day Kirghizstan, where they formed a thriving farming community that existed for over 100 years. Others moved southwest from Tashkent, past the Silk Road cities of Samarkand and Bukhara. For the next four years these people wandered around what is now Uzbekistan, experiencing incredible difficulties, searching for the place to which the Lord had called them.

They had hoped to settle in Bukharan territory, but when they got there the local prince would not permit them to stay. They were caught, and for a period of time they moved back and forth across the border.

...Continued on page 3

Russian Mennonites and Ishmael

By Joseph Yoder

In the book of Genesis, chapter 20, is the intriguing account of Hagar and Ishmael being driven out of the household of Abraham due to the jealousy of Sarah. Perhaps this is all a bit unclear to you. Let me start by saying Abraham is the father of three great religions: Judaism, Islam and Christianity. Abraham was the son of Terah. Exactly when he lived is difficult to know; perhaps in the vicinity of 2500 B.C. God calls Abraham to leave his homeland of Haran and journey to an unspecified destination. He is promised a great nation that would bless the entire world. As Sarah and Abraham get older and no heir for this nation is on the horizon, Sarah gets impatient and orders Abraham to take their maid Hagar, an Egyptian, as his wife in order to get this great nation started. Later, Sarah also conceives and Isaac is born. Out of this offspring comes the Jewish Nation. Jesus comes out of this lineage and so we Christians also claim Abraham.

Back to the opening remark; when Hagar runs out of water in the wilderness she lays poor Ishmael under a bush to die and moves a short distance away because of the pain of watching her son die. As Hagar wept the scriptures tell us: **"And God heard the voice of the boy and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him." Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water...God was with the boy.."** Genesis 21: 17-20.

Elizabeth Stauffer asks an intriguing question. Would we invite Muslims to pray in our meeting house? Here at Menno-Hof Muslims have from time to time asked for a place to pray. We have always offered whatever facilities we had available and considered it a privilege to serve them. We Anabaptists have a rich history with many intriguing stories. Perhaps the story of Abraham, Hagar, Ishmael, Russian Mennonites and the Village of Serabulak could help us to discover our answer. Why not take some time to ponder this question with your faith community?



Twentieth Anniversary Updates

❖ **The Moment of Truth**, a play on the story of Dirk Willems, turned out to be a major success. In four performances from June 27-29 approximately 2,400 people were challenged with the radical story of following Jesus even if it meant losing your life. A few of the benefits were (not an inclusive list):

- Our Amish-Mennonite community was challenged with the radical nature of following Jesus
- Other groups and individuals were similarly challenged
- Menno-Hof raised \$10,000 from donations and the generosity of the Jones family who offered all their services and hard work free of charge
- We reintroduced ourselves to the community when we gave free tours (over 400) of Menno-Hof
- Menno-Hof discovered the joy of mutually working toward a common goal

Menno-Hof wishes to thank the Jones family, our guests and donors who shared in this wonderful experience and made it a memorable weekend.

❖ **Global Anabaptist Slide Show** With the help of Ryan Miller from Mennonite Mission Network we now have our global Anabaptist slide show completed. There are over 400 pictures of Anabaptists from the 75 countries that have an Anabaptist presence. It helps our visitors to see that Anabaptists are larger than the Amish and Mennonites of Northern Indiana. Drop by to see this new addition to the Amish-Mennonite Story at Menno-Hof.

❖ **The Quilt Garden** Thanks to the work of Dana Sommers, our facilities manager; volunteers Lloyd and Sharon Schrock, Steve Troyer, Donna Sommers and Jan Yoder who helped us plant 2700 red and white begonias. With the great summer weather we have been having, the garden is a blaze of flowers reminding one of the beauty of God's creation. We have been hearing nothing but good reviews from many quilt garden enthusiasts who have visited us.

❖ **Volunteer Event** Menno-Hof could not be operated without the great help of our many volunteers. Daily we are blessed with the company of knowledgeable and friendly tour guides. So, volunteers, keep the date of October 21 open when we will have a special event for you. We hope to see all of you.



BOOK REVIEW

Lost Sons by Judy Clemens
Herald Press, 2008, 291 pages, paper, \$15.99

Detective Stan Windemere's son, a sailor in the U.S. Navy, disappears in the frozen tundra of Russia, and Stan finds himself unable to focus on his job. He soon learns of another lost son, Clayton Kratz, who also disappeared in Russia—in 1920. Stan dives into this mystery and prepares for the truth that his own son, like Kratz, may never come home.

"**Lost Sons** is a difficult book to put down. Its breath-tightening suspense comes from the fear of what might happen to characters we like. The interwoven stories of Clayton Kratz and the fictional Jamie Windemere offer poignant parallels and probing questions about serving God and country, and conversation between pacifists and military families."

—Edna Froese, St. Thomas More College
(Excerpt from back cover)

Mennonite-Muslim relationships

...cont. from page 1



When they crossed into Bukhara they were thrown out, but as soon as they were back on Russian territory several young men in the group were subject to being drafted.

Finally in November 1881 they settled into the village of Serabulak for the winter, hoping the Russians would overlook their

presence for a few months. While there something happened that today seems totally unprecedented as the local Muslim leaders reached out to these German Mennonite Christians. Five Mennonite families found lodging within the confines of the mosque courtyard. In addition, they were offered the mosque as a place to worship on Sundays, since the Muslims used it on Fridays and Saturdays. So for about nine months Mennonites worshiped in the mosque. Several weddings and numerous funerals took place there; and it was here that my grandfather was baptized.

As we stood in the mosque 106 years later, recalling the experiences of our pilgrim ancestors, it felt like holy ground. With the local Imam's permission, we prayed and sang "We're marching to Zion," acknowledging our own as well as our ancestors' pilgrimages. One of the resident leaders recorded our singing on his cell phone; perhaps Mennonite voices will continue to sing in Uzbekistan.

As we walked back to our bus, a fellow traveler asked, "How many of our churches would invite an Islamic group to meet in our church building?"

Good question. If a group of Muslims visited our community and our congregation's meeting house, would we invite them to pray in it? And if they settled in the community and did not have a mosque in which to worship, would we offer them the use of our church? Perhaps the Mennonite-Muslim experience of 1882 could help shape our response.

Elizabeth Stauffer, Union, Michigan, is a retired writer/editor. She and her husband Don, accompanied by their son Paul and his wife, traveled to Central Asia with TourMagination in May to retrace the steps of Elizabeth's ancestors. Elizabeth and Don are members of Bonneyville Mennonite Church; Don is a Menno-Hof board member.

MEET OUR VOLUNTEERS

By Miriam Yutzy

John Kreider, the fourth of ten siblings, grew up on a farm near Palmyra, Missouri, during the Depression years. He left the farm at the age of 18 for high school and college studies at Eastern Mennonite High School and College in Harrisonburg, Virginia. John married in 1951 and then enrolled in the Bachelor of Religious Education program at Hesston College, Hesston, Kansas. After completing that program in December 1954, he served as pastor of an inner city church in Kansas City, Missouri. He also served pastorates in California and Colorado. He served as Director of Admissions at Eastern Mennonite Seminary from 1986 to 1995 and completed his seminary degree program during that time. After retirement he did development work for Mennonite Missions Network, Elkhart, Indiana, and continues to do development work for Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center in Toano, Virginia. John and his wife were parents of four children. His wife died in November of 2000 and he married Betty Oberholtzer in June of 2003.

Betty Kreider grew up in California until age 13. Her father left the family four years earlier. In order to help her mother, the Steckly family gave her a home in Michigan. She attended high school at Eastern Mennonite High School where she loved being a dorm student. She met her first husband, Isaac Oberholtzer, there and married at age 18. After 41 years of marriage and three children, Isaac died. Betty enjoyed a busy and full life with children, 6 grandchildren, church work, and meeting her many friends. Betty says, "The Lord has been so good to me." She also enjoys riding her motorcycle with the Christian Motorcycle Association, The Good News Riders. Betty and John are enjoying their time here at Menno-Hof and are impressed with its ministry.

Betty and John arrived from Newport News, Virginia, on July 1, 2008 for a two-month volunteer term. They are adapting well and enhance the Menno-Hof program.

You can now get the current issue of *Reunion* on line at www.mennohof.org. Also get our **Ponderings from the Hof**, (short meditations) and up-to-date happenings under "**What's Happening**" on our website. We welcome your response by E-mail or regular mail.