



# Lover's Quarrel

The Mennonites and Me

*A Testimony*

KEN YODER REED

*"I had a lover's quarrel with the world."*

Robert Frost

*"But here is how God has shown his love for us. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*

Romans 5:8, New Int'l Readers' Version

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## TO MY READERS

After my return to the people of God (Chapter 15), my friend Steve Weaver, a fellow actor in the Dutch Family Festival and an enthusiastic 'charismatic', introduced me to Saturday Night Prayer and Praise at Upper Octorara Pres in Parkesburg, PA. The Upper Octorara pastor was Jim Brown, a man now legendary because the church he led, once a model of Presbyterian propriety, had become a gathering place for disgruntled Christians from various Christian traditions, especially the well-organized and emotionally starved ones, like the Catholics, Presbyterians and Mennonites! The church walls themselves seemed to throb, as worshippers from a broad cross-section of ages and races, black and white and Latino, belted out rowdy praise songs, with lots of clapping and hand raising. We would end the singing with:

*I don't care what church you belong to*

*Just as long as for Jesus you stand.*

*So tonight if your heart is as my heart,*

*You're my brother so give me your hand.*

And then Pastor Brown would call out: 'Does anyone have a testimony? A testimony of what God is doing?'

This book is my response to Pastor Brown, my testimony. This is what God has been doing in the life of Ken Reed. You should expect to read surprising things. God is very jealous of the human beings he creates and when He is getting credited or debited, we can count on him to do hardly believable things. Because he was working in the life of Ken Reed, a sinner, we know God was working with fatally flawed material. This story will illustrate the astonishing truth of Romans 5:8. Because He loved this boy, He intervened when I had been doing my best for some years to disparage and curse his people, convinced that I wasn't 'the faith type'. But I had come at last to the point of exhaustion, a kind of final knot on the rope to which I clung and dangled over the Abyss of Hell, which is where this book begins.

I name many people in this book. Aunts and uncles, brothers and sister, college and high school fellow students and professors, fellow Mennonite artists of the Mennonite Renaissance of the Seventies and Eighties, and people who participated in our great San Francisco experiment. These people's names must be remembered. They shine like lights in the skies of our generation. They also each made a mark on this man's life. Although we lived in the same era and we shared at least one experience together, they may tell the story of what we both experienced differently than I do. Some people may disagree profoundly with my version. I confess at the start that my view of a given reality has my bias.

This is a Mennonite story. Some will say my Mennonite story is not representative, that it's too Euro-centric, too white, too Pennsylvania, maybe too male point-of-view. In my defense,

can we agree that every person's viewpoint will be colored by their particular period of history, their particular heart language, their table of foods and their particular Do's and Don'ts? This story launches in a small, ethnically German farming community and church in eastern Pennsylvania in the 1950's, the brutal political era of McCarthyism when communists were rumored to hide within many organizations. Our nation was in a Cold War with the U.S.S.R. and the communists would win it by corrupting us from the inside, I remember hearing. In this era, a board of bishops wielded temporal and spiritual power over the lives of their congregations in the Lancaster Mennonite Conference, even as the Allies' triumphant defeat of the Axis armies in Europe and the Far East had created a cultural tsunami that would erode the consensus on which the authority of the Board of Bishops rested..

Yes, it is a Mennonite Story. Who is this tiny group, fewer than a million in 1950 in a world of two and a half billion? Mennonites had their beginnings in the Protestant Reformation and the religiously-bigoted, blood-stained landscape of 16<sup>th</sup> Century Europe. Over the last five hundred years, Mennonites have given back to the world through lives of extraordinary faith and suffering, sacrificial service to the world's down-and-outers, even those in enemy countries, while enduring global scattering. In this book I celebrate Mennonites—I believe my birth and upbringing among this people was a valediction, a kind gift from my Creator that I never deserved and certainly didn't earn. Did I appreciate the gift? No! In my story, I turn my back against the Mennonites when I was fifteen, then return and fall in love with them in my twenties and finally, leave this people permanently.

You may find an overlap with my journey—the farm childhood, the Mennonite community, even a writer's adventures and promising relationships with editors and publishers,

or perhaps with the angry teen running away from the Church and then my return in my mid-twenties.

However, a scandal lies in the pages of this book. In the end, Reed walks away from all the overlap of journeys. He walks away from the Blessed Community permanently. Many—perhaps even you—have walked or even run madly away from the Blessed Community. I dedicate this book to all who have walked away from the Mennonites. Or other blessed communities like them.

All reasons for leaving are not equal. Some leave because they 'don't fit in'. The Mennonite label has sometimes felt like the Jewish yellow star in wartime Germany. Very uncomfortable. Draws unwanted attention. Sometimes, especially wartime, downright dangerous. Others left because the Blessed Community hurt them. I know artists who couldn't get published because their work was labeled 'anti-Mennonite' and 'vulgar'. Still others left because their heart transaction with God and faithfulness to that transaction convinced them they had to leave—the experience my wife Kathy and I had in San Francisco as the local congregation took a position on sexuality that we couldn't take. I subscribe to *Anabaptist World* and I hear that positions on sexuality are now a major reason for leaving MCUSA. It's human to disagree. It's human for Christians to disagree as well.

Still others left because they came to hate or blame the Mennonite leaders and Mennonite label for everything wrong in their lives.. If that's you, you may take offense at my title—*Lover's Quarrel*. Yes, I love the Mennonites to this day, although I left the spiritual community some years ago.



I also do not wish to say that if you stayed with the Mennonites and have never left, or if you continue to find life purpose and happiness as a member of this community, that you are somehow wrong. That you have less integrity or perhaps stand on the wrong side of history. I absolutely do not hold such an opinion. I hope you will read my story anyway. Perhaps you will find a way I could have worked things out with the Mennonites or perhaps I could still return. I welcome your opinion.

Finally, I will dedicate this book to all of you who have walked away from the Mennonites, regardless of the reason. Your story deserves to be heard. Perhaps you will find echoes of your story in mine.

**Ken Yoder Reed**

**Fremont, California**

**August 15, 2024**

## Prologue

### The Hotel in Izu, 1969

My heart heard the sound of you walking by, like the footfall our ancestors Adam and Eve heard in the Garden 'in the cool of the day'. Unlike the silence of their world, I lived in a raucous world, with many voices, a cacophony of sounds. The voices circled the inside of my skull like angry yellow jackets and roosted overnight on the dark branches of my brain. From their roosts, they howled, they slobbered, they accused me, they begged me. To my astonishment, in spite of all those voices, I heard the sound of You walking by. But I didn't know it was you.

The first prayer that You answered for me was my cry of desperation in the Izu Peninsula hotel where I sat on the tatami floor that evening in May of 1969, distressed over the failure of my life. My three-year Japan assignment was ending and I had already left Hokkaido, my Japanese 'family', the Yamaguchi's, and my English students there. I arrived in Tokyo and found lodging with a piano bar player and his family in Uguisudani. I had decided to teach English in the capital for the last two months of my assignment so I could experience the capital and catch the train several times a week to the world-renowned Kodokan, where I hoped to complete my blackbelt in judo.

I was living the life I wanted, a life I believed vastly superior to the one in which I'd grown up! In this new world I spoke Japanese, not English. I ate fish and rice three times a day, not potatoes and meat, pickled eggs, cornmeal mush and fruit pies. In this world, people did not

talk of 'inviting Jesus into your heart'. I didn't need to listen to evangelistic preachers and their musicians working to prick the conscience of guilty sinners like myself, with songs like 'Just as I Am' and 'Why Not Tonight?' Japan was a shame culture, not a guilt culture, Ruth Benedict wrote in *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, one of the required readings of our sending organization, and I found this worldview refreshing. I did not embrace the shame culture. I simply jettisoned the guilt culture.

But I had failed my mission, and I knew it. I had come to Japan to further my writing ambition, just as my mentor, Ernest Hemingway, had travelled to Spain and the Spanish Civil War to further his writing career. Three years on, I was no closer to becoming a serious published writer. The handful of articles about life in Japan that I'd sold to the Mennonite press didn't seem very promising. The lords of the Mennonite Publishing House were sufficiently impressed. They offered me an assistant editing position with their family magazine when I returned. I'd written back to accept, with the caveat that I wanted to continue academic studies on the side.

But what academic studies? I didn't know. I only knew that work as an assistant editor still didn't add up to a writing and publishing career of the type that my heroes, men like William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway and Fyodor Dostoevsky, had lived. How did one become a published writer? What did a would-be published author write about?

My problem roosted there on the branches of my brain and taunted me. I had come to Japan after college to escape my Mennonite past, the Mennonite church and the bishops and preachers who represented its power clique. I hated their imprint on my soul. As I look back today, from the vantage point of fifty years later, I hated the very world I could have written

about. I had come here to escape my own people, the farmland of my birth, my Mennonite cousins and uncles and preachers, my Mennonite mother and father and sister and brothers. If I hated them, I hated myself. Can a writer who finds everything about himself repulsive and hateful ever succeed in publishing anything more than fairy tales?

My father had died unexpectedly the previous November. This event peeled off the disguise I wore as I lived my life in Hokkaido, my self-mage of myself as a Japanese man, albeit a Western face that imitated Japanese manners cleverly, like Lafcadio Hearn. The telegram telling of my father's sudden death arrived, and Mrs. Yamaguchi gazed at me from the family sofa as I read the telegram to her and the doctor, the man we all called Papa.

"On his birthday. Ohhhh, I feel so sad for you, Ken-san." Tears trickled down her lovely, oval face.

Doctor Yamaguchi, in his usual thoughtful manner, looked me over and said gruffly:

"You'll want to go home, I think. Do you have a plan?"

I had no plans. Only deep confusion. My Mennonite life still existed. It lived and breathed and called to me although I had convinced myself that I'd buried its dead corpse when I left three years back. That was my primary feeling that day—horror over the return to the past. Yes, I did feel sorry for my father, that his life had ended so early. I didn't grieve his death. He loved me, I knew that, but I'd rejected that love many years earlier because I disrespected him. Was that why my mother could tell me on the phone call the following night that she didn't expect me to come home for his funeral? She didn't think he mattered enough to me to travel 10,000 miles to commemorate his passing?

I left the house to think about Yamaguchi's question and went for a walk in the drizzle, along the stinking Ushibetsu River, which ran yellow-brown as Dijon mustard and clotted with the discharge from the pulp paper mill upstream. As I walked, I shed real tears. Bobby Kennedy had been shot only three months before. Me and the Kennedy family. I cried for a while. Was the drizzle Nature's way of empathizing with my loss?

Two days later I kept my appointment with Ishida-sensei of West High School. I had contracted to teach conversational English to his students one day a week for the school year. I called him to say my father had just died, that I wouldn't teach the class that week. I wasn't sure how he would respond. As his way of showing sympathy, I suppose, he invited me to join him at his favorite bar that night.

The bar was buzzing with hostesses, flitting about in their colorful kimonos. As we entered, a hostess approached, brightly colored as a human butterfly and swirling some wonderful perfume.

"Sensei! It's good to see you!" She leaned against Ishida. To my astonishment, she thrust her hand down the front of his suit pants. "You're happy to see me, too!"

Jealousy washed over me. Please! Some kimono-clad girl! Do the same to me! None offered. As I left the bar that night, a terrible sense of guilt washed over me. My father had died and two days later I was standing in a bar, longing for a sex experience. Even if I didn't love my father, what kind of monster was I?

Then there was the accusation that Hiroshi had flung at me. He'd come to visit me at the Yamaguchi house because the Mennonite missionary in Furano had told him I would be a good

person to ask about conscientious objection to war, since I'd come to Japan as a C.O. 'K\_\_\_ Sensei said the only reason a guy can conscientiously object to war is to be like Jesus, who went as a lamb to the slaughter. Is that what you believe?' He grilled me. I objected, 'There are lots of reasons to become a C.O.,' I said. 'Look at me. I made a choice. Better three years as an English teacher than three years fighting a war in Vietnam. Everyone in my generation believes this war is stupid.' My answer shocked him. But his letter to me three days later shocked me equally. *'You're a phony!'* he accused. *'I am sorry to say, when I left your house, I vowed I will never join your group. The American soldiers in Vietnam impress me more. Their lives are truly splendid lives. Nevertheless, I wish success in all you do in the future.'*

That night in the hotel room in Izu, such memories dive-bombed me, like angry yellow jackets. I'd come to this hot spring town to attend a convention of English teachers and I didn't know anyone here. I put on my Japanese self again as I returned to the hotel alone and drank a good Japanese beer. I ogled the room attendant, wondering how I could persuade her to take off her kimono and lie down beside me on the futon. I felt morally repugnant. Yes, I was a phony, lost in my mission and friend-less.

In such a frame of mind I opened *Good News for Modern Man* with the Annie Volloton drawings, the copy someone had presented me the previous day at the convention. The drawings and the title made me curious. I had never completely scrapped the belief that the Bible might contain answers for me. I scrolled through the pictures. I read randomly. A verse caught my eye:

*'I believed, therefore I spoke'*.

Maybe that was it. I didn't believe. Did anyone really believe? Wasn't it all cultural? If you were raised in a religious culture like the world I'd been raised in, you believed the Mennonite version of God. If you were born Japanese and went on high holy days to Shinto shrines, then you believed prayers offered to the scowling god image, lighting incense sticks and banging on the gong, would bring you blessings. Dr. Yamaguchi, however, insisted such prayers and gods meant nothing. He relished talking about his first days as a doctor in very religious, rural Hokkaido. He set out to demonstrate his independence from the superstition of his own parents, who were shrine god worshippers, by going one evening, after his clinic closed, to the temple. When he arrived before the stone lions that stood guard in front of the temple, in the darkness, alone, he urinated on them, he told me proudly.

So there it was. Belief in God, or Gods, was cultural, and you could take it, or leave it, as Dr. Yamaguchi had. But wasn't there more? For a thirsty soul like mine, there had to be more! A prayer burst upward out of my lungs, across my tongue that night in the hotel. It was very simple:

*If you exist, for I have no evidence today that you do . . . God! Lead me to a man who believes. Someone who believes because he has met you. Not a believer because his culture and upbringing have taught him he must believe, but a believer because he has met you. . . .*

It was my first prayer ever that you answered, Father. The man you sent to me was Yake. After forty years as an editor at the very Publishing House where I was about to take a job the following September, Yake had retired to his 1940s bungalow a block away. He rented his second-floor apartment to me. You answered my prayer by sending C.F. Yake.

I know today that it was the passing Jesus who visited my hotel room that night. The sound I heard, above the cacophony of accusing voices, was your footfall. When I heard the sound, I cried out,

*'God, if you exist . . . '*

You'd been waiting years to hear that. Had you walked other hotel passageways, lingered outside many other rooms where I stayed, waiting to hear my voice? How else can I explain that when I cried, you happened to be there? You happened to hear me?



# **PART ONE**

## **The Blessed Community**

## One

### The Happy Childhood

How did I get so lost? How did I wander so far from the truth I once felt the whole way down to my bones? History knows lots of characters like me. Perhaps the best known is the Prodigal Son. One of two heirs of the wealthy character called Father, the Prodigal demands early distribution of the inheritance moneys and then 'set out for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living'. When the severe famine comes, we find him sitting in the mire among the pigs he tends, jealous of the pigs because of the green pods they are devouring, which he is not permitted to eat to stop the cramping in his own stomach.

The other famous lost character is the Italian, Dante, who wrote in his book *The Inferno*, *'In the middle of the journey of our life, I came to myself, in a dark wood, where the direct way was lost. It is a hard thing to speak of, how wild, harsh and impenetrable that wood was. . . I cannot rightly say how I entered it. I was so full of sleep, at that point where I abandoned the true way'*.

How did I stray from the certainty of my sunny and happy childhood?

Daniel and Phebe Reed, my parents, purchased a farm in rural Lebanon County, Pennsylvania, in March of my third grade. Dad always said his motive was to provide a place for his four sons to grow. We moved into a rambling, 200-year-old, three-story on top of a stone

and mortar cellar, cut into the side of a small slope. That is, the original house only needed protection from the elements on three sides. The fourth side was an earthen bank. The original builder had constructed the house above the foundation with massive logs, some as broad across as a car wheel, dovetailed at the corners, cementing the crevices with mortar mixed with horsehair. Subsequent owners covered the house with green shingles that concealed the logs. Our family slept on the second floor, under the large attic which was itself covered by a galvanized tin roof that sang whenever it rained. We lived on the first floor and hardly used the cellar, which had a mud floor and an active upwelling spring in one corner. Because the foundation ground was porous and the spring trickled out under the east stone wall on its way to the creek, the stone and mortar walls had sunk about six inches over the years, so that our kitchen table stood on a floor that slanted north to south. My mother and sister's chairs were on the south side of the table. Whenever one of my brothers on the bench spilled a glass of water, everyone scrambled to lift the vinyl tablecloth and puddle the water before it spilled onto my mom and sister Sally!

Our farm spanned the width of Monroe Valley. The north pastures and cash crop fields, planted with tomatoes and later soybeans, ran up to the line of trees at the base of the Blue Mountain. If you climbed the 500-foot-wide trail cut for the power lines that ran through the maples and oaks up the mountainside and then down the other side to Schuylkill County beyond, you would cross the famous Appalachian Trail on top, the trail that still runs from Maine to Georgia. Big Crick ran down the middle of our property, on its way from Lake Carson and Lake Strauss to the 'Swatty', Swatara Crick, several miles off to the west. Our hill fields, usually

planted in long strips of corn or alfalfa, climbed away from Big Crick at about a thirty-degree angle up the side of Little Mountain, in the south.

The farm had three assets to make every boy's heart pound with joy. Asset One—the creeks. In addition to Big Crick (as we pronounced it) , a smaller creek (which we of course named Little Crick) ran perpendicular to Big Crick from its source at the base of the Blue Mountain, through a pine woods, bisected our cow pastures, passed through the marsh below our house, traversed a steel culvert under the east/west macadam road that ran the length of our Valley, pooled just beyond the bridge and then slanted easily on for another thousand yards until it merged into Big Crick. From May till October, my brothers and I ran barefoot across the farm, sometimes doing farm work but many hours simply exploring the two creeks. The pool beyond the bridge contained sunfish and, we discovered, a large snapping turtle. The crude, partly finished pond that my father's business partner Getzie had bulldozed into the meadow between the house and the creek filled with two feet of warm, mocha-colored water in which we could observe all the stages of frog life, from the long jelly strands of eggs, with thousands of black boba-looking spheres, to pudgy-headed tadpoles with only a tail, initially, until their legs sprouted. Every night, the peepers serenaded us to sleep.

Big Crick contained larger mysteries to explore. Where the creek crossed into our property, beneath an electrified fence that we boys were tasked to maintain by clearing away weeds that touched it, the creek made a large bend, where the slowing water ran four feet deep. Freshwater mussels hid in the sandy bottom, visible to the educated eye as inch-long black lines. We dug them out and flushed them with water for half a day to see if they were edible. They

failed that test. I also tried putting grains of sand between the bivalves and then replacing them in the creek bed to see if they might develop pearls. They failed that test too.

Flooding added adventure to both creeks, especially Little Crick. Drift wood and large tree branches would jam the entrance to the culvert, at least once a year, and create an enormous milk-tea colored lake that came almost to the cellar door. How deep? Was it safe to cross? Our cows could swim and my brother and I straddled them and reached back to twist their tails to compel them to cross the lake.

A Second Asset was animals. Can I say the animals were friends? We gave every one of the black-and-white or red cows a name and they responded when we called their names. They knew their stalls and trotted directly to the correct stall when we called them from the meadow every afternoon. I associated warmth and creature comfort with their large, squared-off bodies and bulging udders, which poured forth milk cans full of milk which we robbed from their calves, most of them already gone to auction. In winter especially, when the winds off the Blue Mountain howled and piled snow around the barn and outbuildings, I would roll apart the large barn doors at 6:30, still well before dawn, to join my father in the milking. The sweet odor of dried alfalfa, mixed with the musky smell of thirty bodies, blew out, and a feeling like home, contentment and well-being swelled in me.

The cows represented work, of course. Every morning, every evening, three hundred and sixty-five days a year, they waited to be fed. They bawled as they ran into the barn because they were hungry. They sometimes bawled because their udders were full and painful. They bawled when we led their calves away from them and sometimes a cow would set up a call-and-response across the barn with her unseen calf, which we had penned away with the other calves and fed

with a steel bucket that had a large rubber teat attached. We spent weeks every summer baling hay for the winter months and chopping corn to blow into the silo, where it would steep and marinate in its juices for months until it became what I imagine was a cow's fantasy of a smorgasbord—stinky, fermented silage that smelled like the Yuengling Brewery on the outskirts of Lebanon.

In addition to the cows, we had cats, dozens of cats, black ones, white ones, tortoiseshell, calico and gray ones. They would show up, meowing, every morning and evening because my dad pitied them and could be counted on, every milking, to fill an old truck hubcap with warm milk. My brothers and I tolerated them because they eliminated the rat problem we had had when we first moved there. We definitely did not consider them friends.

We had chickens as well. My mother contracted with the local chicken processing plant and they provided boxes of peeps, which we fed and raised until they reached four or five pounds apiece and then—always on a dark moonless night, it seemed to me—a truck would back its trailer in front of our barn second floor, loaded with empty chicken crates. An hour later, the truck would rumble away, with the chickens thrusting their desperate heads through the crate bars to protest, on their way to the processing plant. We didn't befriend them or the pigs, either.

My rabbits were a different story. Although I'd purchased these New Zealand Whites with the purpose of breeding and producing many babies that I could sell profitably, I still regarded the rabbits fondly. I cradled the mother against my chest. In the end, she was a disappointment as a mother because she didn't know how to take care of her offspring and half of them died. I finally sold her and the buck to the meat market.

In addition to the domesticated animals, wild animals roamed our acreage, out-of-sight most of the daylight hours. Ringneck pheasants strutted the corn rows, gleaning the fallen grain. Barn swallows used mouthfuls of clay to build elaborate gourd-shaped dwellings that they pasted to the eaves of the barn forebay. Fat groundhogs lived in the fields and dug burrows that could break the front axle of the tractor, if you hit the hole at a bad angle—groundhogs were always targets that my brother and I could use Dad's 30-30 on. Muskrats dug holes in the creek bank and my brother Joe read their tracks in the snow and camouflaged steel traps with snow to catch them for their beautiful pelts.

Evenings when we returned by car, often from a church meeting, my father would drive down the Little Mountain dirt road and abruptly turn right into the break in the line of locust trees, to enter our hillside fields. The car headlights would reflect eerie, disembodied eyeballs, sometimes as many as a dozen sets of them. The eyeballs hung motionless, about five feet up, as he shut off the engine. Then they wheeled, all of them at once, as if they were one animal, and our headlights showed ghostly outlines of antlers and trademark erect white tails as they bounded away. Dad was law-abiding. He got his deer during those several weeks in October when our whole community stopped and even the schools recessed a day or two for hunting season. Our neighbors up the valley regarded the game laws as suggestions and we heard rumors they hunted and sold deer meat all year long.

But the best asset any boy can have is brothers. I was the oldest of four, with Clayte and Joe following two years apart and then my brother Herb after three years. Whatever I was exploring, they were exploring. In the early days, we ran everywhere as a band, barefooted. In later years, we rode our bikes. I assumed some leadership but only in the areas of imagination

and exploration. The world of books seemed more colorful to me than the mundane world of chores, school and church. Books fed my imagination and grew it like the swelling cumulonimbus clouds that rode in from the West on hot summer afternoons. I wrote my first stories when I was nine, which I shared with our Reed cousins at family get-togethers. My cousins, Nonie and Dick, declared:

‘Kenny’s a writer.’

I stored those words like Mary, Jesus’ mother, ‘who pondered these things in her heart’. Yes, that would be my destiny in life.

My brothers, Clayte and Joe, were practical boys. Clayte loved tractor driving, mechanical things and galloping bare-back on his chestnut mare. He would become a mechanic, first working on cars, later on airplanes. Joe was developing into an outdoorsman. He would become an expert on tracking animals by their tracks in the snow or the mud along the creeks, hunting them first with a rifle, then with a bow. His adult nickname was Joe Five Bears, in honor of his hunting achievements. At the cabin he owned together with his wife’s brothers, an eight-foot-tall black bear greeted you in the entryway, skillfully reconstructed by the taxidermist. But both of them played along with my imaginary games.

In the summertime, Dad ordered us to chase the cows to the north meadow, which had no fences. We boys were assigned to ‘watch the cows’ and make sure they didn’t stray into the adjoining corn field, where rows of fresh green corn awaited, as succulent and tempting to the cows as the little ice cream truck that drove up and down the valley in the summertime was to us. We camped under a great spreading apple tree on the bank of Little Crick and built ‘towns’,



which I dubbed 'Pittsburgh' because we located them at the juncture of two branches of Little Crick, just like the real Pittsburgh located at the juncture of the Allegheny and the Monongahela.

We made small 'houses' and 'garages' by jamming four Y-shaped branches into the streambank and then roofing them over with cross-branches covered with leaves or grass. We built 'roads' by transporting shovelfuls of the abundant yellow clay from the creekbank, smoothing it into fifteen or twenty foot long 'roadways' and letting it bake dry and hard. Clayte and Joe drove their toy trucks or cars on the road. 'Trucks and cars' is a liberal term since we didn't have such toys but used the fruit of skunk cabbages, round hard balls the size of softballs, which made excellent cars when hollowed out to hold the few hard plastic figurines we owned. I always ran the restaurant, where I served up raspberries and blackberries speared on sassafras twigs and occasionally, graham crackers with a tablespoon of Nestle's Quik on top, which my brothers paid for with the currency of 'Pittsburgh'—a type of silky swamp grass. When it rained, we stayed in the house and hauled out a large collection of paper cowboys and paper long-horned cattle and did 'cattle drives to Wichita' on our beds.

To this day, my brothers remember these days fondly and we tease each other with words I also coined to describe events in our everyday life for which ordinary words didn't seem to fit:

'cheeka ma toi ma toi ma tosis'—squeezing your brother's mouth when it was full of cherries, to the point he forcibly spewed them out.

'dithyramb'—a bop on your brother's head with a closed fist.

Even my sisters-in-law learned these words and when we get together, to this day, Herb's wife Vera will sometimes pop one of them into a conversation.

All this teaches me the absolute power of the imagination and how it is that video games and popular songs hold such a hypnotic grip on the minds of our children. The Marvell superheroes are real to them! They act out the heroes and sing the pop songs, word-perfect/ Do they know Biblical heroes and Sunday School songs like that?

Herb was seven years younger than me. Herb was the naturalist. He chased after the honeybees and insects of our Valley and would go on to earn his PhD Entomology. He and his wife, Vera, went to Nairobi, Kenya, after college, where they taught school to missionaries' kids. When they returned, he became a professor and county agent.

After five tries, my parents succeeded in providing us with a sister. Sally was a year younger than Herb. I don't remember her running with our band of boys but she participated in most farm activities. She became a florist and after she finished Bible college, she worked in a series of social services as a home-based mental health therapist. Sally had a heart for the broken world—perhaps because the early death of our father and our terrible church split had wounded her so deeply. She and her husband Ken Wayne would adopt three children and foster others.

As we grew up on the farm, the hymn 'This is My Father's World' expresses what my brothers, Sally and I felt, although we couldn't have articulated it then:

*This is my Father's world  
He shines in all that's fair  
In the rustling grass I hear him pass  
He speaks to me everywhere.*

*This is my Father's world  
And to my listening ears  
All nature sings and round me rings  
The music of the sphere.*

Or, as the Apostle puts it in Romans One,

*'For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made. . . '*

Like people everywhere who depend on the weather, following the cycle of the seasons as we planted and harvested the crops and watched the birth and death of our animals, we believed in a powerful unseen God behind it all.