

CHRONICLES

WINTER 2003 THE QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE VALLEY BRETHREN-MENNONITE HERITAGE CENTER VOL I NO.4

This fourth issue of Chronicles completes the stories of the faces in the diamond.

Christopher Kennel is unique among these faces. Since he is still living, obviously, his story is not complete. He is self conscious at being a "poster boy" and wonders why he was selected. His inclusion is intentional. He represents all of us who are still carrying out our faith traditions through daily living, who are in the midst of our Journeys of Faith and Conscience, who do not know where our Journeys will lead.



christopher kennel still on the journey

Christopher Kennel, Harrisonburg native and EMHS graduate, traveled to Thailand in 1996 through Goshen College's cultural exchange program. There, he worked with Mennonite Central Committee advocating on behalf of refugees from Burma.

When Chris heard Bible stories in a different civilization he recognized the impact of culture on their interpretation. Most intriguing was the story of the woman washing the feet of Jesus. In Thai culture, parts of the body have special significance; the head represents authority and the feet are considered dirty. Lowering your head to the level of someone's feet demonstrates humility beyond our comprehension.

After graduating from Goshen College in 2000, he married Marija Dubrick and moved to Indianapolis where his wife was in medical school. In Indianapolis, Chris worked in public health, interviewing patients with sexually transmitted diseases, locating their partners and recruiting participants for research projects on behavior. These were primarily adolescents who had no discomfort discussing their sexual activities and partners; it was Chris who had to learn how to deal with his embarrassment, to be more assertive and non-judgmental.

Church in Goshen was somewhat non-traditional, diverse, "on the fringes of the broader Mennonite Church." It felt like a family where members shared freely about personal difficulties; this lack of pretense was liberating. It was a period of spiritual growth through participation in such a close faith community.

Earlier this year, Marija and Chris went to Nepal for clinical training for her medical school. This allowed exposure to yet another culture. In Nepal, being a Christian usually results in ostracism from your family because it signifies a break from the dominant Hindu culture and belief system. In Chris's view, being a Christian is fashionable in our culture; it requires no sacrifice. With our affluence, it is hard to feel like we need God, hard to appreciate our blessings, hard to have a global perspective.

Chris and Marija live in Denver now where she works in family practice. He has chosen to restore old houses in downtown Denver with a group of mainly Mennonite carpenters. The work keeps him physically active and presents an outlet for creativity.



Christopher Kennel

It is important to him to follow the teachings of non-violence, the Sermon on the Mount, to pray for people who harm others. "It is not what you do but who you are that matters," he believes.

Chris is embarrassed at being a living symbol of CrossRoads. "I'm really not a very good Mennonite," he explains.

civil war book features local families' struggles

A new book, *Unionists and the Civil War Experience in the Shenandoah Valley*, tells the stories of 37 local families who suffered loss during the Civil War. These families lived in Pleasant Valley, Mt. Crawford, the Friedens Church community, Cross Keys, and the Mill Creek-Goods Mill areas. Most of these were Brethren and Mennonite families.

This 750-page hardcover compiles the claims these 37 families submitted to the Southern Claims Commission established by the Federal Government following the war. Many of their claims for compensation were denied.

Researchers Norman Wenger and David Rodes have compiled these claims from the National Archives, and Emmert Bittinger, history professor emeritus at Bridgewater College, has prepared the volume for publication, including abstracts and an introduction. Civil War historian John Heatwole has written the preface.

The book is available at Reflections of Yesterday in the Dayton Farmers Market for \$49.95 plus tax. It may also be ordered from Valley Research Associates, PO Box 526, Dayton, VA 22821. The total cost for mail orders is \$58.50, including tax and shipping, payable to Valley Research Associates.

Welcome Center takes shape

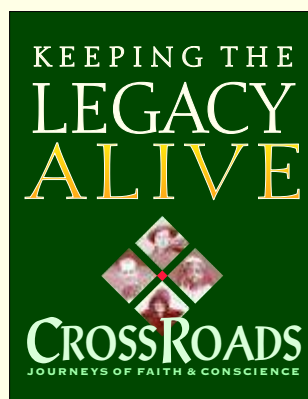
The Heritage Center board recently acquired the brick ranch house adjacent to the CrossRoads campus and is now converting it into a Welcome Center for use while restoration of the historic buildings is underway. This center will:

- ◆ House offices and a place for board and committee meetings
- ◆ Contain rotating exhibits to stir interest in the life of our heritage
- ◆ Offer space for special programs to interpret our legacy of faith
- ◆ Provide a unique atmosphere for meetings, small dinners, speakers
- ◆ Serve as the starting point for site tours as buildings are being restored

See the Gift Ideas for Christmas column for items you may be able to supply to get the center up and running. Your help will be deeply appreciated.

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