ABOUT THOSE REIMERS

A MEMOIR

Elizabeth Reimer Bartel

Rosetta Projects

2010

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Bartel, Elizabeth Reimer, 1925-
About those Reimers / by Elizabeth Reimer Bartel.

ISBN 978-0-9784629-9-4

1. Reimer family. 2. Mennonites—Manitoba—Steinbach—Biography.
3. Steinbach (Man.)—Biography. 4. Frontier and pioneer
life—Manitoba.
I. Title.

FC3399.S7Z48 2010 971.27'4 C2010-902923-2

Designed by Frank Reimer Designs

Edited by Ryan Hiebert

Prepared for publication by Dianne Hiebert

Printed by Island Blue / Printorium Bookworks.

Printed in Canada

Mixed Sources
Cert no. SW-COC-001271
© 1996 FSC

Author's note

Not everyone will agree with some of the events I have portrayed. I have tried to be as honest as possible without hurting anyone's feelings. I have changed names where I felt privacy was called for. Some events are not in chronological order. In many instances I have not remembered dialogue word for word but have tried to stay true to the meaning of what was expressed. If there are errors they are mine alone.

I want to thank my sisters Naomi Reimer Lepp, Wendlyn Reimer Rempel, Martini Reimer Janz, Hildie Reimer Terry and the late Linea Reimer Geiser for their contributions to this work. They were definitely all Reimers and not at a loss for words. In a family like ours each of my sisters remembered different things that added to the story. Being the parents of six outspoken daughters who talked all the time can't have been easy. May they rest in peace.

This book is dedicated to the memory of
my youngest sister

Linea Reimer Geiser
1936-2010

Miles no longer matter
nor do time and space
for we are one in spirit
I feel your hand in mine
and stroke your cheek

Dearest sister, I thank God
for the blessing you have been
my inspiration and delight
We have done this harrowing journey
together until
I have to let you go
baptized into the Light.

There are many Reimers on this planet – just check any Mennonite genealogy. When I tell someone my name, they will quite often ask, but which Reimers? Are you by any chance from those Reimers? And the questions will begin. What happened to the store? Who got the land? Did your Uncle Henry ever marry? And what about your Tante Ennie? And so I have bared my soul and written about my family, those Reimers. This is the way I remember it and lived it.

ACROSS HALF THE WORLD

THEY WERE MENNONITES, MY ANCESTORS, who were forced eastward across Europe by centuries of war and upheaval. Time and again they loaded down their sturdy oxen and home-built wagons with all their worldly belongings: farm equipment, ploughshares, spare spokes for wagon wheels, scythes, anvils, bellows. Other wagons were piled high with household goods: butter churns, fine wooden chests, iron kettles of various sizes, a weaving loom, a child's cradle, a carved wooden rocker. Between the feather beds piled high was the family's precious leather covered Bible, the elders' lengthy diaries and an elaborate wall clock, stilled while on their way and silent until they reached their journey's end.

These deep roots in my family tree originated in the lowlands of Germany and Holland, where the Mennonites were caught up between the religious fervour of the Reformation and the Inquisition. Neither Catholic nor Protestant, and persecuted by both, their cruel punishment was often drowning or burning at the stake. They were more artisan than farmer, and free thinkers all, who spurned the dogma of both the Catholics and Protestants. A peaceful life often eluded them, yet they wanted only to be left to practice their religion according to their understanding of the Bible.

The survivors fled across the low-slung banks of the Netherlands to the Danzig Delta in Poland. A northern people, innovative and industrious, with fair skin and blue eyes, they flourished there, became good farmers, drained swamps and built dikes. Two hundred years later, though, Frederick the Great threatened to withdraw his promise of their military exemption.

In 1790, Catherine the Great of Russia offered them this crucial military exemption, along with fertile land on the banks of the Dnieper River, not far

from the Black Sea. They accepted and set off once more, with their plain clothes, adult baptism and pacifist doctrines intact.

In Russia they formed villages, which they administered with little interference from the Tsarina far away in Moscow. Over a period of a hundred years they built churches, schools, hospitals and factories. Again their military exemption was threatened, this time by the Tsar. So, in 1874, after almost a hundred years – and far more prosperous than they had ever been – they prepared to move again.

They moved en masse, led by the elders of the church, village by village, each with its blacksmith, wheelwright, miller, bonesetter and schoolteacher. They were transported from the rich farmland of southern Russia to the wilds of Manitoba, which seemed empty, inhabited by scattered aboriginal people, fur traders and the few intrepid colonists who had preceded them.

My grandfather was then nine years old. He came with his brothers and sisters, parents and grandparents, uncles and aunts, cousins and second cousins. Infants, spinsters and octogenarians, rich and poor alike; no one was left behind.

They did not come to Canada as refugees since they had had time to sell their farms and mills and smithies for their full value before they took to the road, travelling first by wagon to the nearest railhead, then by train across the face of Europe.

I sometimes think of Europe then, in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Napoleon and his armies had come and gone, his soldiers buried in unmarked and uncounted foreign graves. Napoleon himself was imprisoned on a lonely island, his dreams of glory in tatters, until he too died like any ordinary man. Otto Von Bismarck ruled over a Germany united for the first time. The Emperor Franz Josef still sat uneasily on the Austro-Hungarian throne. All of Vienna was dancing to the music of Johann Straus. The lilting melodies could be heard through the windows of palaces and on the streets, while inside the opera houses the audience toasted the drunken jailer in another delightful piece of nonsense, "*Die Fledermaus*."

My great-great grandmother, Elizabeth Rempel Reimer, will have been mildly titillated by such worldly nonsense. She was a sharp-eyed woman who had taken on the considerable task of shepherding all of her children and grandchildren on this Mennonite odyssey. Our matriarch, talented as she was, would have had her hands full with her husband Abraham – in his diary he cannot extol her talents and virtues enough.

"*De Fula*," the lazy one, it was said of him. At night he gazed at the stars and then he slept during the day instead of attending to his hay crop and milch cows. It is recorded in a diary that on this journey he was so caught up in the strange sights and sounds around him that he missed the conductor's call to board the train for Dresden. His wife and children must have called to him from the back of the train. But he was shrewd enough to board another train and catch up with them in Leipzig. The account of his adventures now lies behind plate glass in the Steinbach museum.

I imagine them as they travel across half the world, by train to Hamburg, by boat across the North Sea to Hull, in England, across pastoral English countryside. Many years later, my maternal grandfather recalled how, when they reached the docks at Liverpool, a tall slim lady in a dark blue uniform presented him with a fresh white dinner roll spread with butter and jam. The Salvation Army was on the job. That one gesture affected how he would view the English ever after.

I think of them, my forbears, after weeks at sea, arriving in Quebec City; the chatter of French, a strange language overwhelming them, the trauma of going through customs, the elders answering the difficult questions flung at them. Finally they are permitted to board the train that will take them across another continent. By this time the men in their dark homespun shirts are restless on that train. Their farmer's hands have lain idle for weeks. Still, their guileless Dutch blue eyes gleam at the thought of all the acres that they will seed and harvest.

Their wives, in their long, full skirts, braided hair covered by a kerchief, are also thinking of the future – a strong chimney, windows facing south, a garden fence. But as always women have to be practical. One takes a wailing baby from his mother's aching arms and rocks him to sleep to the rhythm of the turning wheels, while the other women add sticks of wood to the dying fire in the cookstove at the back of their immigrant carriage. They arrange, yet again, with the last of the food they have brought with them: the sacks of *rusk*s, the smoked ham, roasted barley for the ersatz coffee.

Meanwhile the children are glued to the windows, oohing and aahing at the sights; the brick factories lining the right of way, the stops where the train takes on coal and water. They pass through cities where men dressed in fine suits stroll along under the leafy trees. Their wives in velvet and furs cling to their strong arms. The bells toll from the steeples of large brick churches, crosses pointing up to the heavens.

An endless ribbon of steel has carried them over soaring bridges and along the shores of a lake which seems to them as large as an ocean. Dark green spruce crowds its endless miles of shoreline, until the chuffing locomotive plunges them back into more wilderness of spruce and pine, with tiny lakes set like jewels among the evergreens. Aspen saplings cling to the ancient rock of the Precambrian Shield until at last the train is flung out as if on a gigantic stage, with endless prairie rolling away into the distance.

Soon they will reach the sluggish grey depths of the Red River flowing north. Paddlewheelers will carry them to their destination, a grassy spot along the river. Here they will disembark on the edge of the East Reserve, a block of land along the east side of the Red River from north of Emerson to south of Winnipeg and east as far as Ste. Anne. The village of Steinbach will become its centre.

The East Reserve and Manitoba are in the centre of Canada. If you are travelling west on Highway #1 from Ontario to Manitoba, you pass through the Whiteshell Forest Reserve. This is cottage country, the summer haven of city dwellers. Private cottages, each with a long finger of wooden dock reaching out over the deep blue water of West Hawk Lake, are visible from the highway. The scent of spruce and pine cooking in the sun will rise up to meet you through the open window of your car, along with the smells of summer – sand, cool water and frying fish.

If you travel here in the winter there will be a deep cover of snow, perfect for cross-country skiing. The swish of your well-waxed skis will slide as if they have a will of their own. On every snowdrift the tracks of snowbirds and small animals can be seen: field mice, owls, rabbits. It is a frozen landscape and very quiet. You can hear yourself breathing.

At all times and seasons, the smooth concrete road will lull you into thinking that the outcropping of ancient Precambrian rock on either side of the road will go on for ever. But suddenly, the acres of dark green spruce give way to prairie land flat as a table top, once the bottom of a vast prehistoric lake which geologists have named Agassiz.

This road is really part of the old Dawson Trail cut through the brush and muskeg in 1874. The road was built to provide passage for soldiers from Montreal sent to put down the Métis and Riel in 1885.

Today the old road is a divided highway. There are wide grass-covered ditches, barbed wire, tilled fields. A few miles on, travelers arrive at the intersection of Hwy 12 and the village of Ste. Anne. French Canadians moved

here long ago to live alongside the Cree and Ojibway who had roamed these plains since time immemorial. The old Dawson Trail still goes right through Ste. Anne, passing the old Hudson's Bay trading fort, its timbers now rotting slowly away, past the Roman Catholic Church and convent where black-shrouded nuns can often be seen, walking slowly with their arms crossed, hands deep in their black robes. The spire above them reaches high into the blue Manitoba sky. It can be seen for miles in this flat land of the Red River Valley.

We bump over the CN railroad tracks which lead to Giroux, Labroquerie, and on through the Sandilands Forest Reserve all the way to the United States border. We cross over the Seine River where black and white Holstein cows ruminate below the bridge knee deep in the lush greenery and shallow water. This river is a small tributary which runs north to empty into the Red River at St. Vital, a leafy suburb of Winnipeg.

We are now in the East Reserve, a parcel of land several thousand acres in size, set aside by an Act of the Dominion government for the settlement of the Mennonite migration of 1874.

The miles go by, past prosperous farmsteads and pastures alternating with fields of alfalfa and sweet clover. Off in the distance are the low-lying fields called Greenland where my grandfather would have cut hay as a boy. We pass Blumenort, flourishing now, although its original village site where my mother was born is no more. The only portion of land that has not given way to the plough and the harrow is the nearby cemetery where my maternal grandmother, who died in childbirth in 1899, lies buried.

The land here in the East Reserve was once farmed communally. But by 1911, the village of Steinbach, self-governing from its inception as were all other villages in the East Reserve, was taken into the rural municipality of Hanover and communal farming was discontinued. Steinbach became a village in Hanover, and each individual householder took title to his or her own land. The social structures which the Mennonites had brought with them continued, such as the *Weisenamt*, welfare for the care of widows and orphans, and the universal fire insurance called the *Brandtordnung*. The church remained the pervasive influence in dictating public and private behaviour.

These days, as we drive further south along the road we see farm machinery, enormous tractors and combines in bright colours – red, green, yellow, with not a speck of dust or cow manure besmirching their gleaming sides. They line both sides of the road facing each other, like army tanks waiting to attack. Their air-conditioned cabs are higher than a small house. They look costly. This is

rich farming country.

Automobile agencies line the road, too, with their showrooms framed in gleaming plate glass windows, behind which are displayed the very latest in modern automobile engineering. The second-hand trade-ins outside, no longer in the limelight, look abandoned under the glaring lights of the car lots. Gaudy plastic ribbons are strung high, rustling and shimmering. This is, after all, the Automobile City advertised on billboards along major North American highways. Several new motels and fast-food outlets stand off to the side in what looks like a farmer's field. The rich black earth they are built on is some of the most valuable agricultural land on the planet.

On the left side of the road is the famous Mennonite Museum with its distinctive windmill. Artisans from Holland came to help build it, the Mennonites having lost the art of windmill construction in their rush to take on modern ways. Large flat blades turn slowly in the light breeze. The museum has become a tourist destination for travelers of many faiths. It houses artifacts of Mennonite life in the early years of settlement. Old cradles, rocking chairs, washtubs and Bibles stand as mute testament to the past behind plate glass.

A model village street of olden days has been reconstructed on the museum grounds. One of the first schools and a church, still intact, have been moved from their original sites on abandoned Mennonite villages in the East Reserve. A house with attached barn has been painstakingly erected in the style that the settlers favoured and brought with them. It is a style which dates back to medieval times.

About a mile past the museum gates is a traffic light where we turn east. This is the Main Street of Steinbach, the street that I remember as a quiet village road about a mile long. None of that old country quiet remains. Steinbach is a modern city now. Long gone are the old settler houses clad in whitewashed cedar shingles which lined this street on both sides when I was a child. The row of cottonwood trees planted before I was born have been cut down. Instead there are sculptured concrete road dividers filled with trim birch saplings, exotic ornamental shrubbery, and cascading flowering vines. Everywhere are the blinking neon signs of chain stores: Reitman's Dress Shoppe, Zeller's, Safeway. The old established businesses like Penner's Transfer, Loewen Garage, and H.W. Reimer's Department Store have all faded into history.

At the intersection of Reimer Avenue and Main Street, where my grandmother's big yellow house once stood, is a large bank, its exterior faced with slabs of polished black stone. Across the street, where my grandfather's

store once extended from Main Street a full block to what was then Mill Street, stand the council chambers and offices of the City of Steinbach. Along Main Street, world renowned fast-food franchises have swallowed up the familiar Pete's Inn, Brandt's Cafe, and the once popular Fruit Store with its soda fountain and white wrought iron tables and chairs. The bakery, the livery barn, the flour mill, the hatchery, and the shoemaker have all disappeared like so much snow in spring. The ghosts of my many ancestors seem to haunt this street where they first came to set up their homes and enterprises.

Originally the village of Steinbach was laid out much like the villages left behind in Russia. Each of the eighteen founding families was allotted a farmstead fronting the village street, with a house facing the street and behind it an attached barn. At the back there were outbuildings, and behind them a large garden and a pasture. With time, orchards would flourish between the front of the houses and the street. My grandmother often recalled how in the spring, when the hardy plums, cherries and crab apples buzzed with bees, the air would be overpoweringly sweet.

Behind these allotments ran the creek which gave Steinbach its name – Stony Brook, when translated into English. It meandered along at the back of the allotments, rushing with melt-water in the spring and calmed to a more modest stream during the summer months. The water ran clear and cold along the gravelly bottom with tumbled granite rocks, scattered during the last Ice Age and smoothed by time. Willows trailed their green leaves in the water. A grove of stunted oak trees with tortured branches grew along its banks.

But that too has changed. Most of southeastern Manitoba has been crisscrossed with ditches for draining low-lying farm fields. By the time I was growing up, much less water flowed in the creek. Now the creek has been paved over, with ugly galvanized steel culverts placed strategically under the road to carry away the water which once flowed free.

So much has changed here. When I come now, all that I once knew and loved has changed beyond all recognition. I grieve for the past.

l–r Martini, Hildegarde, Wendy, standing behind them – Elizabeth, Winnipeg, 1935

ELIZABETH ANNE

I WAS BORN HERE IN STEINBACH in the summer of 1925, in the sewing room of my grandmother's house. I was the third daughter of John Wiebe Reimer and Anna Dueck Toews, and a direct descendant of Klaus Reimer. My great-grandfather emigrated from the Danzig area of Poland to Russia in 1795, where he broke away from the *Grosze Gemeinde* and founded the *Kleinegemeinde* Church. The Mennonites were always hairsplitters when it came to theology.

The room where I was born was called the sewing room. Besides two high narrow beds, a tall burnished oak bureau and a rocking chair, it held only a treadle sewing machine which stood under a window clad in white sheer and facing south. Its smooth dark lid when half-open revealed the nickel-plated head and the black wrought iron treadle against the stark white plaster wall behind. The machine was used twice a year when Miss Kreuger, the seamstress, came to sew the simple garments which my grandmother always wore.

The sewing room was where the Reimer grandchildren were born under the watchful eye of my grandmother and *Jreite*, who was grandmother's *Kjaakjsche.* Her name was really *Margretha* but in our low-German *Platte* we called her *Jreite* or *Jreita (Grete).* She helped to oversee things as important as grandchildren making their entrance into the world. It seemed practical to both of them to use grandmother's large house, where there were high ceilings with lots of fresh air, an electric washing machine beside the large furnace in the basement, hot running water, flush toilets, and plenty of room for prams where babies could take the air on shaded summer porches.

When it came time for my birth, my mother was ushered to bed in this room at my grandmother's behest. Our good Doctor Schilstra attended my birth. As I grew older I would become accustomed to the tall man with the gruff voice whose heavy tweed suit smelled of strong tobacco and the odoriferous medications from his private dispensary. He had an untidy red moustache

streaked with gray from which protruded a smoking pipe clenched between his teeth.

In later years I would become familiar with his office, which was in the front room of a tall white house on Mill Street. In summer the house was buried deep in shrubbery. In winter, snow drifts almost covered the front windows. Whenever I was taken to see him, I felt overwhelmed by the jungle of greenery which so dimmed the light from the windows that the black leather upholstered chairs and settee almost disappeared in the gloom. The smell of strange concoctions from his dispensary hovered in the air.

As time went on I would learn that as a young soldier he had survived the trenches of World War I. Originally from Holland, he and his wife, who was also a doctor, had come to practice among the Mennonites in the small isolated village of Steinbach. Blood spoke to blood, and despite theological difference, the Reimers and the Schilstras mingled socially. Their sons played tennis on the court behind my grandmother's big yellow house and their oldest daughter Marie became a close friend to my Tante Ennie, my father's oldest sister.

My mother held the Schilstras in high regard. My mother was raised in Kansas, could speak good English and mixed easily with strangers. Once, not long before I was born, my three-year-old sister Wendy had choked on an unpeeled apple, and Doctor Schilstra had saved her life. I was always avid to hear about happenings before I was born. I imagined my father with his hair standing straight up, running through the dark night for the doctor, and the two of them, coat tails flying, leaping over fences with the doctor's medical bag in one hand and a smoking pipe firmly fixed between his teeth. They were my heroes, then.

At my birth, it will have been Grete into whose hands I was caught and held, who washed me, wrapped me briskly in warm flannel and chucked me under the chin, who smiled at me before she handed me over to my mother.

Grete, one of many such girls whom my grandmother rescued, came from one or another poor family among the sticks and stones of farmland around Barkfield, a few miles from Steinbach not far from where my grandmother herself had grown up. She seemed happy enough to be rescued from that poverty-stricken hinterland. Every few years, when one of the current kitchen maids left for marriage or an illness in her family, my grandmother would have Adeline – my oldest cousin who lived with my grandparents when she was attending high school – start up the family Plymouth. It was one of the first automobiles in Steinbach and Adeline had been driving it since she was twelve,

when her legs had grown long enough to reach the self starter and the pedals. She would chauffeur my grandmother the few rough miles to Barkfield to bring home another girl. Adeline cared what kind of girl Grandmother would bring home. She would have to share a room with her.

Grete stayed on with my grandmother for years. She was sometimes passed on to help out in Prairie Rose where Adeline's mother, my Aunt Katherine, was often ailing. Adeline and Grete would share the burden of her mother's constant hypochondriacal fretting. My Aunt Katherine, short and plump with tiny feet, would immediately rise from her bed and greet us cheerfully when we came for a visit, her aches and pains forgotten. She would get out her guitar and play and sing in a rollicking voice. Soon she would call for strong coffee with rich cream, both forbidden by Doctor Schilstra, but she was wilful and paid no attention to his admonishments.

Several days after my birth the doctor came to make sure that all was well. He would have found my mother and me well cared for. I imagine her dressed in a fresh gown and sitting in a chair beside the open window, while Grete put fresh sun-dried sheets on the narrow bed. My mother rocked my cradle with one foot, and breathed in the fragrance of early summer blossoms and the resin of the nearby pine trees where the hot sun had warmed them. Below her the peonies bloomed, shedding the thousands of petals which blanketed the freshly turned earth like snow. The jingle of a horse's harness would be heard as it passed by on the street, along with the sound of a car blowing its horn. Make way, make way, it seemed to be saying in its strident Model T voice.

After bidding the doctor good day, my grandmother would gratefully sink into her favourite sofa in the dining room beside the kitchen. She trusted doctors, especially Doctor Schilstra, more than she trusted Grete's mutterings about herbal nostrums and other archaic remedies.

From time to time, my grandmother related horror stories of her girlhood in Barkfield where she had grown up. There, diphtheria and other communicable diseases raged periodically. She would begin to sob when she told how, in one night, she had watched three of her small brothers choke to death on their own phlegm. Their struggles for breath finally stopped as they turned blue and cold. Her small plump hands would tighten around her neck to demonstrate how it had been, more tears rolling down her round cheeks.

My grandfather, trying to cheer our usually cheerful grandmother, would put a soothing hand on her black-clad shoulder. He had heard my grandmother's stories a hundred times more often than I had. Sternness was called for, but he

could not bring himself to be harsh with her.

In 1922, he had stood by her when her whole family, after barely fifty years in Canada, tore up their short-lived roots and emigrated to Paraguay. For theological reasons, it was said. The provincial government, once so welcoming to the Mennonites, had passed the Manitoba Schools Act which took away the right for Mennonites to control their own schools.

My grandfather was a devout Mennonite. But he was not so devout that he would give up everything he had worked for here in Manitoba and move his wife and nine children to the thorny, snake-ridden land that was the Chaco in 1922. I never heard my grandmother question his decision. I would never know my Wiebe aunts, uncles and cousins as I knew the Reimer ones. I have often thought how close I came to being South American rather than North American.

My parents named me Elizabeth Anne. I once asked my mother why it was that my sisters all had such romantic names and I was stuck with Elizabeth Anne. My oldest sister had been named for Naomi in the Bible. The next daughter was called Wendlyn – not a popular name among Mennonites. "Your father was reading a book," my mother answered shortly, "and the heroine's name was Wendlyn." She sounded tired. I was about ten years old at the time and not aware that my mother was a few months pregnant, and eventually I would have another baby sister, the sixth and last.

"What about Martini? What about Hildegarde?" I pleaded. They were the names of my younger sisters. "Was Papa reading books then, too?" I queried. "What about me? Elizabeth Anne?" I waited for a reply.

She thought for a moment. "Well. I have to tell you. I was very happy when you were born. I had been sad for many months because I lost a baby. I thought God was punishing me. I was raised Holdeman and by now you know how strict they are, although I love them all dearly. But I couldn't bring myself to be baptized into that faith. I don't know why. I think I must have been waiting for your father. And you know *my* father, you know how kind and gentle he is. He would not let the church elders press me."

I could have hugged her. My mother had saved me from being Holdeman. I did not want to be Holdeman and wear the same plain dress, and marry a husband with a beard who never wore a tie. Besides, I had heard how they excommunicated erring members. If my mother had been baptized, and then married my father, she would not be able to eat at the same table with her family and could never join them in the family feasts. I still admire her for her

steadfastness. Because of her courage she remained, all her life, the darling of her Holdeman family.

"After I lost the baby I felt very guilty and sad," she continued. "And one day when I could not stand it any longer, your father and I went to the *Elteste* at his *Kleinegemeinde* and poured our hearts out. He was so kind and gentle; I will be everlastingly grateful to him for his understanding. So a few months before you were born, I was baptized by the same *Elteste* in our *Kleinegemeinde* church. And my father even attended, much to the dismay of the Holdeman elders." She smiled happily, stroking my hair.

"So when you were born, we named you Elizabeth Anne for my mother who died when I was two." Her eyes always grew damp when she told this oft repeated tale. She never forgot that she had grown up motherless even though she had a stepmother who was kind enough.

She would go on, "I remember clearly how my sister helped me up onto a stool so I could kiss her goodbye as she lay in her coffin." My mother wiped her eyes with the white handkerchief she held ready in her hand.

"Please don't die, Mama," I stroked her hand. I would stop complaining. It didn't matter that I did not have a romantic name. I would accept it with a special history all its own. A few years later, when it came time to name my youngest sister, we were allowed to choose her name. We turned out to be just as romantic as my father, and named her Linea Yvonne.

When I was ten days old and still under my grandmother's care, I was examined by the doctor one final time. He conferred with my grandmother and both agreed it was time to send me home.

I imagine how the small cortège would have set off on a fine summer morning, my mother carrying me wrapped in a pale pink shawl, with Grete on one side and my Grandmother on the other. They will have crossed the street past the horses flicking flies with their tails, occasionally stomping with great hairy feet, as they stood tied to the iron rail on the large concrete pad that ran the full width of the store. Maybe my father came out of the wide double doors and down the steps of the store to take me from my mother's arm, his third daughter, but somehow I doubt it.

I always knew that he was very proud of his beautiful wife and daughters. But I think we came along almost faster than he could cope with. And I think he wondered if it would be the manly thing to do, to walk out of the store to attend to such an intimate family matter? In those days most fathers were far more distant in showing their more tender feelings to their children.

Maybe I have misjudged him. When it came to his wife, he openly showed his love for her. We would stand by as they kissed and hugged, not realizing then how starved we were for the same sign of affection from him.

He always did his fatherly Christian duty by us and taught us our evening prayer when we were small, beginning with "*Ich bin Klein, mein Hertz ist Rein*," which means "I am small, my heart is clean." As we grew older we learned a more difficult one, *"Jesu Blut und Gerechtigkeit*," or "Jesus, blood and righteousness."

It could have been Latin as far as I knew, for I did not understand the words until I was much older and began German lessons. The German I learned in kindergarten did not cover words like righteousness. In church the religious German words streamed thoughtlessly through my head. But it was the feel and the rhythm of the stark Anabaptist ethos which entered my flesh and bones.

At every bedtime, when my father was at home, we stood before him in our long nightgowns, like little gnomes, and repeated the familiar words. Then we placed an obligatory peck against his shaven cheek and scampered off to bed with our nurse-maid Suschie. Was it something sexual that made him afraid to touch our female flesh? Now, when I hear about fathers molesting their daughters I realize I should be grateful. If we were sick my father seemed more approachable. When we had bad coughs he would gently rub "Vicks VapoRub" on our aching chests and fold one of his soft woolen socks around our throats.

On that first walk home I like to think he did come out and walk us along the sidewalk past the store windows, which probably featured bicycles, hoes, rakes and galvanized watering cans, for the coming warm weather. Then, we would have proceeded through the gate between two tall cottonwoods, one on each side of the walk leading to the front door. He will have left us as we reached the low front porch. A small face would peer through the Virginia Creeper almost burying the front window; it was my oldest sister, Naomi, checking to see if we were coming.