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FAITH & LIFE A MENNONITE PERSPECTIVE

by

Gord
Alton



Learning from Uganda

In the Bible, there is a story that compares the giving of rich people with a poor widow. The poor widow offered to God the only two coins she has while the rich people placed a portion of their wealth in the temple money box. During Paul McDowell's and my eighteen day visit to an Ugandan parish in August, this Bible story took on new meaning. I was confronted with poor people everywhere, including many widows, and yet these people were so generous with us, especially the widows.

We spent one day with the Catholic young adults having discussions, playing, eating, and dancing. Our time ended with the young adults forming a processional line where they sang, clapped, and formed a circle around us. The procession ended with giving of gifts to Paul and me. When we visited the Church's primary school, gift giving happened again. After two hours of singing, presentations, and dancing, the children also formed a line. As the children sang, danced, and clapped, they came forward, one by one, with a gift from their parents—bananas, pineapple, eggs, yams, mangoes, sugarcane, etc. These items became our food for the next days. During five evenings, Paul and I ate in people's homes. Each of these meals were feasts, food in abundance, away more than they normally ate, and often we received a gift from the host. At an afternoon wedding reception, Paul and I found ourselves as the guest of honor. Again, there was a time of offering, this time, each of the eight sub-parishes were invited to bring a gift to us.

On our final day in the community, we met with two groups, the Organic Farmers group and the Widows group. We heard songs, a powerful drama about how families take advantage of widows, and group reports followed by another

feast. Following the abundant meal, gifts again were presented to us. First, the thirty-some farmers did a procession of dancing and singing as they formed a circle around us and gave us each gifts. Following this offering, over fifty widows formed a line and danced up to us and each one gave us a gift—a hand-made mat, a hand-crafted bowl, newspaper wrapped eggs, fruit, more crafts, and on and on the line went. The poorest of the community, the widows, most losing husbands to HIV/AIDS, were giving us one gift after another. I was overwhelmed with tears.

How does one begin to understand this experience of gift-giving in Uganda? It was very different than the gift-giving that happens in Canada, even at Christmas time. It was truly an offering of themselves to us.

To hear more stories about our trip to Uganda, join us on Nov. 12 for a night of pictures and storytelling at Parkview Village Auditorium at 7:30 p.m.

By Gord Alton

Feedback? We'd love to hear your comments. Please contact us at:

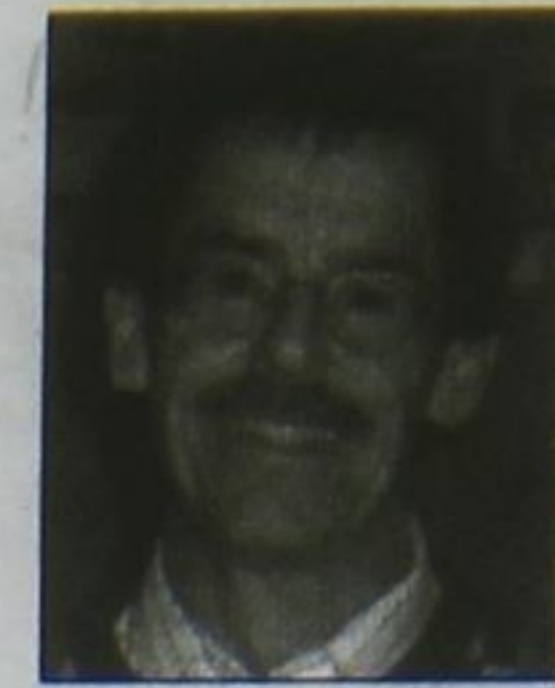
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Community Mennonite Church

Parkview Village Auditorium
12184 Ninth Line • 905-640-9730

Sunday School: 9:45 - 10:30 am
Sunday Worship: 11:00 am

Stumbling through Stouffville



with
Bruce
Stapley

A surprise party

In terms of bang for the buck, the surprise birthday party has to be one of the most questionable undertakings, given the time, energy and expense involved.

After all, the whole thing hinges on that one big moment, the payoff, when the "victim" suddenly realizes he or she has been "had", that what was supposed to have been a quiet romantic evening with a significant other is actually a blow out bash including everyone of significance that they have ever known.

And of course, just like in some other peak moments in life where nagging doubts abound as to whether a partner's euphoric response has been embellished in order not to bruise the ego of a significant other, there's always the very real possibility that the one on the receiving end of said surprise party has had to fake their astonished reaction, having picked up on a few too many clues along the way.

But for a family that has been assembled far too many times the past few years to plan funerals and deal with other unsavory life issues, my sister Pat's recent surprise 50th birthday party was just what the doctor ordered. For once, there were no life and death decisions to be made, no ashes to be scattered, no financial crises to be dealt with.

No, it was finally party time, time to let our hair down and celebrate a momentous occasion. For my brother-in-law and my sister's offspring, the stress and strain of weeks of planning, phoning and firing off endless e-mails evaporated in the few seconds it took for Pat to realize what had been done on her behalf.

There was no doubt she was genuinely surprised. Just as the credit card ad so cleverly concludes, the look on her face when she realized the room she had just walked into was filled with the people she had loved and been loved by all her life was, indeed, priceless. Pat's famous mile-wide grin filled the room. She was, as they say so aptly in New Zealand, "absolutely gobsmacked". Her response had all of us laughing, cheering, and at the same time a little choked up. Which is as it should be at times like this.

The speeches that followed, all of them spontaneous, were both comical and poignant. One by one, the guests recalled the hijinks of Pat's youth, the pain and heartache of growing up and adulthood, and, above all else, the good times intertwined among them all. A true testimony to a half century of life.

Sure, there were moments when Pat and the rest of us were so painfully aware of the reality that there were some very significant absences—a Dad, a Mom, and a sister-in-law, all of whom have passed on over the past year or two.

But that only served to reinforce the fact that, with the last of five siblings hitting the 50 mark, the spotlight was now on our 14 offspring and their blossoming families as they now represent the future for us all.

Hopefully, my sister Pat will live another 50 years, getting to experience the joy and satisfactions that can accompany the middle and senior years.

But one thing's for sure. Her first five decades were a hit, and the memory of a successful surprise party will live on forever in her memory, as well as in the memories of all of us who love her.

Healthy Hints

Finding calcium



with
Suze
Joyce

Want a practical holistic approach to your health issues? E-mail Suze at healingforce17@netscape.net.

Suze Joyce is a Registered Nutritional Consulting Practitioner. After years of suffering with arthritis and IBS, Suze found alternative ways to help herself and will share these and many more.

Dear Suze: I have recently been diagnosed with osteoporosis; what calcium alternatives are there to dairy?

Although milk does contain calcium, many people do not realize that it is very difficult for people to digest the calcium. A cow has four stomachs to digest the calcium and we have but one. Also, the enzyme that is present in milk for the calf to digest the calcium is destroyed when the milk is pasteurized.

It has been said that children are drinking too many soft drinks and not enough milk, and that is why we have a high rate of osteoporosis. The truth of the matter is that we need a one to one ratio of calcium to phosphorus. It takes

phosphorus to carbonate beverages, therefore when we drink carbonated beverages our body pulls calcium from our bones to balance.

Keeping in mind that a cow eats grass which in turn produces calcium, greens are a great way to get calcium—broccoli, romaine lettuce, asparagus, beets, avocados, kale, green leafy vegetables, etc. Sesame seeds, almonds, hazelnuts, brazil nuts, kelp, tofu, brewer's yeast and oats are also great sources.

Absorption of calcium is increased with sufficient Vitamin D (sunshine is the best source), magnesium (chlorophyll, nuts, seeds and tofu), exercise, phosphorus balance, and fat intake (nuts, almonds and hazelnuts). Many people drink skim or 1% milk believing that they are getting calcium, while in fact the fat is required to absorb the calcium. Keep your diet alkaline, as acid leeches calcium from the body. A liquid calcium, magnesium and vitamin D supplement has one of the best absorption rates.