

Fall 2015

Sketching the Stories of the Ausbund

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Recommended Citation

Keim, Carita B. Ms., "Sketching the Stories of the Ausbund" (2015). *Honors Research Projects*. 215.

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“To the praise of God . . . though very coarse”:

Sketching the Stories of the *Ausbund*

Critical Essay

The *Ausbund*, a hymnbook, is a historical anomaly for its tenacious usage. The Amish, one of the few surviving folk cultures in the United States, still sing the hymns in the original German. Their ancestors penned the words to these hymns nearly five hundred years ago on another continent. Ironically, the Amish arose in opposition to the Latin Christian Church (later known as the Roman Catholic Church), yet could be considered to be nearly their equal in their tradition. The two churches both share a belief in the sacredness of language; Roman Catholics still perform some services in Latin, and the Amish still perform most of their services in High German. Both churches hold onto this tradition despite the difficulty of teaching each new generation a language no longer in vernacular use in their region. But the Catholic tradition, due to its large scope of population, countries, and time, contains much more variation, influences, and themes than does the *Ausbund*. Despite the relatively small scope of the *Ausbund*, the hymns penned in a little less than a two hundred year span are still in use, influencing a small group of people to themes of resignation, sacrifice, and service to God. It continues to serve as a source of literary studies, religious inspiration, and cultural interest.

The small scope of hymns in the *Ausbund* could be much larger. Its title, *Ausbund*, a German word meaning “a true selection or sampling” is debatable whether it is actually used correctly (“Introduction” 3). It is certainly a sampling, for the number of songs written between 1525 to 1570 numbers around 750. This is a large number, considering the intense persecution. But continuing until 1700, the Anabaptists wrote around 2000 songs. The plethora of music may be a response to the lack of other sorts of art, considering that they were influenced by the

iconoclastic and almost ascetic Ulrich Zwingli, of the Swiss Reformation. They eschewed images, as well as instrumental music, because they saw no references to these two types of art in the New Testament. The full title narrows the scope further, calling the hymns “some beautiful Christian songs as they were now and then composed in the prison in Paussau in the castle by the Swiss Brethren and by other orthodox Christians. To each and every Christian, of whatever religion they may be, impartially very useful” (Schreibner 37). This long title indicates that they were meant to be used among different denominations, but this does not appear to have happened.

The Anabaptist movement, often called the Radical Reformation, began in 1525, as a radicalized version of Ulrich Zwingli’s Swiss Reformation. Conrad Grebel, a protégé of Zwingli, Felix Manz, a priest, and George Blaurock separated themselves from the Swiss Reformation and Latin Christianity by re-baptizing themselves to indicate that they chose to follow Christ voluntarily, not as infants unconsciously baptized into the Church. This was not a new idea; Zwingli had shown Grebel the Scripture to support such a decision. But when Zwingli continued to baptize babies against his own personal convictions, twenty-five year old Grebel decided to separate himself from his mentor. Grebel, Manz, and Blaurock and their followers immediately came under persecution and were derisively given the name “Wiedertaufer,” or “re-baptizers,” which has since become the name “Anabaptist.” These men studied at universities and at least Grebel studied under one of the most influential minds of Europe. However, the original leaders died very suddenly, either from fever, plague, or persecution. Schreibner writes that the while the original leaders wrote down their thoughts, creating a somewhat stable and coherent theology, when these men died, men with less education took their place. Thus, the movement became associated with and led by uneducated people and peasants (7). In addition, the persecution they

faced from everyone in any sort of power kept them from defining their own movement. Many other radicalized offshoots of the Reformation became associated with the Anabaptists. The Peasant War of 1525-1527 was led by an Anabaptist, but already by this time, his views were in direct contradiction with the Swiss Brethren movement of Anabaptism, who developed a belief in non-violence, either pacifism or nonresistance.

Adult baptism and non-violence are distinctive beliefs of the Anabaptist movement that have survived to modern times. The Anabaptists believed in the pure church, or visible church, as distinct from the rest of the world. They took Luther's injunction, "The just shall live by faith," and added, "Faith without works is dead," placing a high premium on a distinctive lifestyle characterized by bodily purity, honesty with all people, and sacrificial living.

The original leaders probably did not intend for these distinctives to lead to separate communities, but separate communities did evolve, partly because of their belief system, and partly because of the intense persecution they were subjected to. In fact, out of the one hundred forty songs of the *Ausbund*, only two are written by non-Anabaptists, Martin Luther and Jan Hus (Schreibner 38). The Swiss Brethren, from whom the Amish and Mennonites derived, fled to the isolated mountains of Switzerland, and some attempted to survive on the fertile farmland of the Alsace and Palatinate regions, relying on their humility and excellent farming to keep their necks. After a mere one hundred years of being called the Radical Reformation for their passionate and accelerated pace of reform, they settled into survival mode, eking out meager and humble existences, separated from many of their brethren.

This may explain why they held on so tightly to the one somewhat widespread piece of literature that the movement had produced, the *Ausbund*. Schreibner writes that the earliest part was printed in 1564, but the earliest and most complete edition comes from 1583 (36). From

1622 to 1800, several editions were printed, but they had to be distributed secretly. The secretive nature of publication for 250 years gave rise to myths concerning the music sung by the early Anabaptists.

Music, especially of this time period, is and was meant to be corporate. However, the secretive nature of Anabaptists for the first 200 years of their existence shaped the way they were sung and used. Schreibner speculates that some of these songs could have been printed in separate “newspapers” and distributed. Most of songs’ structures mimicked those of ballads, but would not have been sung in public marketplaces or pubs as other ballads would have been performed (Schreibner 47-48). More distinctly, the songs act as “Taglieder”, or “historic songs”, in this setting used as martyr hymns which spoke of events and people significant to the authors and their spiritual descendants (“History” 7). Yet, because of their ballad-like style, the songs fit better as songs sung by a circle of friends than a congregation on Sunday morning, as they are used today (“History” 7).

The tunes of the *Ausbund* also fit better to a circle of friends than a congregation. John Humble, referenced by Schreibner, calls the tunes of the *Ausbund* a “rich field of study for the folklorist,” while Rudolf Wolkan, also referenced by Schreibner, claims that the “hymns of the *Ausbund* were the best sixteenth-century folklore tradition” (39). Today, the hymns more resemble Gregorian chants than folk tunes. They are somewhat Gregorian in origin, in that the folk tunes of Germany had a history in the prevalent Gregorian chants of the Middle Ages (“Tunes” 12). However, by the time the Anabaptists borrowed the tunes, they had been secularized. The message of the song was so much more important than the tune of the song to these earnest Anabaptists. In one instance, they sing a song of martyrdom to the tune “There went a maiden with a jug” (“Tunes” 11). This is just one incongruous example.

But one could argue that the study of tunes is almost anachronistic, for 450 and more years of isolated singing of these tunes has evolved them to near complete disguise. The Amish sing in a style called by them the “Schloha Weisa”, or “slow tunes.” The slow manner elongates the words into several syllables, creating the need for more hooks and slurs in the tunes. Jackson, quoted in “Tunes of the *Ausbund*,” explains the evolving phenomenon:

It is a common observation that groups sing more slowly [than individuals]. And when the group is uncontrolled (by instrument, director, or notation) it drags still more . . . The human vocal apparatus does not seem to be able to hold to a given note very long without letting down, breaking over into some sort of pitch variation. Hence the singer, holding as best he can to any given tone while waiting till the group-mind decides to sing the next tune-tone, tends to waver up and down. If the wobbling-about remained the self-relief of one person among the many singing together, it might well be neglected by the recorder of the group. But it doesn't remain thus. The relief of one tends to become the relief of many. The many tend to waver along similar lines, and a singing manner is born—or evolves. (14-15)

The “slow tunes” illustrate well the slowly evolving nature of the Amish brought on by conservatism and isolation. The arbitrary devolvement of their singing tradition could also explain other arbitrary traditions of the Amish, such as their abstinence from buttons, clean-shaven faces, or tradition of black caps for unmarried women and white for married women. Like this series of traditions, the Amish have created a spiritual explanation for their slow singing, calling it more pious. However, many of these spiritual explanations utilize faulty logic or irrelevant history.

The reason for the tunes and the manner of singing may be anachronistic, but the lyrics of the songs continue to be a source of inspiration. Yet the songs are not masterpieces. Schreibner describes the writers of these songs, pointing out their lack of “fanciful, inventive, or exuberant poetic artistry” (54). In addition, the songs employ the ballad tradition in great lengths. The average length of the songs is 16.4 stanzas (54), making it impossible for the Amish to sing most of the songs in their entirety (Schreibner 39). Schreibner, who could be either called incisive or condescending, describes the effect their length and quality have had on their use: “The undue length and vagueness or repetitiousness may well be added reasons why they have not been accepted outside the *Ausbund* and the Amish brotherhood” (39). He also points out that the “efforts to preserve a certain rhyme pattern [have] often been forced not only into a willful abandoning of the rules of grammar and syntax, but an altogether new language seems to have been created” (39). This arbitrary creation of culture could be likened to what happened later with their tunes.

Yet, if one understands the purpose of the songs, and the encouragement that they were for a small group of persecuted persons, then their value becomes more apparent. Dean Ramaker, quoted by Schreibner, explains that “their appeal is rather to the heart than to the head” (39). And Schreibner also concedes, saying, “The *Ausbund* hymns have an immediate appeal in their sincerity and Christian conviction” (39). Similarly, if one understand the purpose of these songs to be like a cultural or spiritual legacy, their value becomes more apparent. For a persecuted group, unrepresented in the arts, these songs have value in helping to shape and explain the identity of the Amish and their spiritual relatives.

The arrangement of the songs helps to explain the identity of the Amish and their spiritual relatives. The first song follows the example of many other hymnbooks, praising and

exhorting others to sing (The Translation Committee 37). But the second song gives the Anabaptist Confession of Faith, written by the passionate Hutterite Peter Riedemann. The song versifies a confession of faith similar to the Nicene Creed, beginning with the words, “We all believe in one God / And love Him from our hearts” (1-2). Already by Songs No. 3 and 4 do the martyr songs begin. Song No. 3 relates well-known early church martyrs, reflecting the significant connection Anabaptist felt with the persecuted early church. The martyr songs do not end there; they comprise half of the *Ausbund* (“Introduction” 4). This indicates that martyrdom as an identity could be the reason for the Amish and some Mennonites’ continued isolation, well into the twenty-first century in the United States, where religious persecution has all but ceased.

The songs reflect the spirit of martyrdom in several surprising ways. For instance, the heroes of the songs list females as well as males. Considering the patriarchal society of the Amish, this is surprising. It would be interesting to study how many times the Amish actually sing the songs with feminine heroes. Thirty-three people are named. Many of these names come from Song No. 3, which references twenty-five people. Sixteen names are male, like Jeremiah and Ezekiel of the Bible, and Ignatius and Polycarp of the early church. Nine, over half, are women, like Blandina, St. Agnes, and Symphoria. Song No. 4 gives almost equal time to Eleazar and a mother of seven sons. Although the *Ausbund* contains twenty-two male names and only eleven women’s names, their inclusion still indicates their importance in the early Anabaptist church.

Song No. 13, which relates the story of Elizabeth, is of particular interest. Thirty-eight stanzas of four lines each tell her tale. Little is known about the author, except that he or she was probably Dutch. The tale does not succumb to common inconsistencies of detailing female heroism, like emphasizing passive resistance, or rescue by males. It does mention her features,

calling her “Pleasant, lovely, and well-mannered” (2). But the rest of the poem does not mince words to speak of her heroism. She answers her persecutors with strong words, “You have in this no foundation, / The scriptures make no mention of it, / Therefore I think it certainly is not good” (38-40). While the translation may lack in eloquence, one can clearly hear the force of her personality. She continues to speak with the logic of the Scriptures (49), continues to be brave in the pain of torture, which included finger clamping and having her nails pulled off (97-100) and screws in her legs (119-120). Her example cannot be undermined even today when many Amish women are seen and not heard.

Several of the songs of the *Ausbund* do defy the lackluster reputation that many have among scholars. Of those, Song No. 47 is often considered the most beautiful, and one could argue that its beauty does reflect what is best about the Anabaptist tradition, rather than borrowing from other traditions. The author of this song is unknown, but Schreiber and others believe him to be one trained in the formal art of writing songs, a “Meisterlied” (The Translation Committee 93). The song compares the beauty of the Winter and Summer to Law and Grace. For the rural, farming Amish, references to seasons and landscapes may have more meaning than they do for other cultures. The author draws the parallels plainly: “The winter time signifies the law, / Wherein was frozen so hard / The fruit of godly grace” (17-19). Law and grace dwell in many Amish communities, dwelling in their strict church rules regulating lifestyle, but grace also appears in their ability to forgive those who have hurt them, or in the way that Amish families welcome their young people back from Rumspringa. The penultimate stanza seems especially appropriate to the uneducated, earnest Amish:

To the praise of God; a person, though very coarse,
Is prepared through such labor,

So God gives his increase,

To him be the honor, and to no other. (81-84)

The *Ausbund* is a unique piece of art that has literary, cultural, and spiritual value. It had value in the sixteenth century, when most of the hymns were penned, but its value has increased in the intervening centuries. It preserves and promotes a sacrificial culture, one that draws identity and meaning from the songs. One cannot know whether the Amish celebrate the gendered diversity of the songs, but the gendered diversity and the earnestness of many of the pieces can continue to give inspiration and belonging.

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Sketching the Stories of the *Ausbund*

I live in Holmes County, the home of the largest Amish community in the world. My family is not Amish; we are Mennonite. Here, we are all the spiritual grandchild of the Amish, because nearly everyone has Amish ancestry. But this series of essays is not intended to be a colloquial history of the Amish and Mennonites, but rather a colloquial history of how literature written by craftsmen of the sixteenth century continues to influence a newly affluent and traditional community in the twenty-first century. In particular, this project investigates the ballads compiled into the *Ausbund*, which literally means “a true selection or sampling. This hymnbook is the oldest one continuously in use in the world. Although the hymnbook was compiled by Amish and Mennonite ancestors, only the Amish use it today. Why do they still use it today? Perhaps it is because of the resignation of which they so often spoke, a resignation they viewed as godly.

In other communities, Mennonites exist independently of the Amish and could be considered their spiritual cousins. Mennonites and Amish were a radical part of the Reformation in the sixteenth century; they eschewed all political power and insisted that Christianity be voluntary. To show this, they re-baptized themselves as adults, an act which the traditional Latin Church interpreted as a slap in the face. They criticized the traditional Latin Church, declared themselves outside of the Pope’s power, and were burned at the stake and drowned in barrels for their defiance. They criticized their spiritual mentor, Ulrich Zwingli of Zurich, and were driven to the barren hills and Alps of the Swiss countryside. After the earliest zeal died down, some ventured back to their farms on the Alsace and the Palatinate, where they farmed as best they could, meekly internalizing the government’s marginalization, unfair legal system, and higher taxes. Times were good when food was scarce, and their expertise was needed, but they got

worse when times got better. Their farms were often seized, and they found no permanent security in their successful farms of that region. But that's where they stayed, in the marginalized plains of the Alsace and the barren hills of Switzerland.

They stayed there until the eighteenth century, when, tired of living hunted and desperate lives, thousands scraped up enough money for a passage to the New World. There, they constituted many of the first farmers of the rich countryside of Penn's Woods. They marveled at the freedom of the land, writing back to their relatives that their Lutheran neighbors waved at them from their plows, and the English Baptists greeted them at the general store. They were like forlorn dogs learning to trust men again.

But perhaps it was their on again, off again with the German governments in the Alsace that frightened them. Like many German immigrants, they continued to speak German. They continued their traditions of meeting in barns and houses, as they had done in the Old World where a meeting house would have been a target for government persecution. And they continued to sing their songs.

They wrote their songs during the period of most fervent persecution in what are now Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, between 1525 and 1570 ("Introduction" 3). The song-writers were craftsmen, but not necessarily crafters of songs. They were tailors, shoemakers, furniture makers, vine dressers, and farmers. Some were ministers, as was Leonard Clock, author of the most popular song, familiarly called the "Loblied", translated simply as "Praises". A few of these German songs were typical hymns, containing theology and inspiration. But at least half of them were ballads, or history songs, detailing their own persecutions or the persecutions of the early church, their adopted forefathers ("Introduction" 4). These were long ballads, some stretching out as long as thirty-five verses. In 1564, they were compiled, secretly printed, and smuggled

from house church to barn meeting. The songs spoke of faith, of endurance, of *Gelassenheit*, a word that became a part of their spiritual DNA, meaning “resignation.”

Perhaps it was their Old World tradition of resigning themselves to their lot, putting their head down and plodding the path ahead of them that caused them to continue to speak German. Perhaps it was their tradition that kept them dressing in a distinctive, plain garb, or kept their women wearing prayer caps or veilings. Perhaps it was their resignation that kept the Swiss Amish continuing to speak German even during the American persecution of many German cultural elements in the two world wars when their less persecuted German and Dutch Mennonite relatives gave up their distinct language in favor of English. But it was certainly their fear of persecution that kept them clustered in tight, folk communities during their three hundred years of peace in America. As a result, they became known for their furniture, quilts, and farming rather than for their original zeal for spiritual truth which originally earned them the label of “Radical Reformers.”

This resignation is certainly at odds with current ideas about the power of the individual to change one’s destiny. It is certainly at odds with the American ideal of democracy. It is certainly at odds with the original ideals of their Radical Reformer ancestors. So one needs to ask: How valid are these hymns? Do they have value beyond cultural studies? Is their continued existence and use a testament to the rich heritage that their composers left to their descendants? Or is their continued use rather an affective and misguided attempt to pay homage to ancestors who died in a confusing, turbulent time?

“We Still Have Their Songs”: Song 33 by Martin from Villgraten

It’s always intrigued me that of the *Ausbund*’s selection of 140 songs, very few were written by non-Anabaptists. These people long ago took their own stories very seriously. Despite the significantly smaller population of Anabaptist Reformers during the Reformation, they insisted their own songs were more important than the great classics written during the time. Martin Luther penned “A Mighty Fortress” during this time, a song mighty in imagery and idea. Yet, they favored songs such as the one written by “Martin from Villgraten.” A history of the *Ausbund*, called *Songs of the Ausbund*, gives us a background. Caspar Schuster from Schöneck and Martin were beheaded in 1538 after being held at Michelsburg Castle in Puster Valley in Tyrol (The Translation Committee 70). Sometime before his death, he penned the words to Song 33 of the *Ausbund*.

A note that has been kept with this song says that despite their deaths, we “still have their songs” (70). This is a small note to a short song, at least for the *Ausbund*. It’s only seven stanzas, with straightforward poetry such as “Give attention to the prophet’s teaching, / It is the last hour” (10-11). This seems appropriate for someone who faced death as he and his comrades did, but it’s not clear exactly when in his journey he wrote it. Much of the poetry is simple, giving advice:

Guard yourself against sin,
The devil do not follow.
Trust in God alone,
From the bottom of your heart. (21-24)

This is a common theme, for some of them did recant from their faith, most notably the great writer Balthasar Hubmaier, who was one of Anabaptism’s most articulate advocates. The fear of

separation from their community of faith was strong. So it seems appropriate that despite not knowing much about this hero, Martin from Villgraten, the Amish continue to sing his simple words, sung to the “Toler” tune.

Not having spent time in other faith communities, I don’t know if the practice of fanatically holding on to one’s stories is practiced as much as in mine. I remember growing up in a household with many books written by Mennonites or Amish, about Mennonites or Amish. Most of these were self-published, with printings of fewer than a thousand. I often recognized the publisher as the printing house from the next town over, Walnut Creek. Invariably, an uninviting block of color comprised most of the cover, with a pencil drawing of a modestly dressed heroine prominently displaying the head veiling or simple belted homemade dress. I didn’t usually enjoy the books, with one exception. The story was an affective autobiography of a neglected child, called *Sandi’s Anchor of Hope*.

One incident stood out to me in vivid color. At four years old, Sandi attempted to feed her little sister. Her mother was passed out on the sofa. She found a knife and tried to slice open pack of hot dogs, instead slicing her hand and arm. I pictured a short preschooler awkwardly manipulating the slimy pack on a countertop above her head. My heart ached for this little girl. The story followed her throughout life. I shook my ten year old head as a grown up might do when I read that she fell for a man who would break her heart. I was so happy when she found Jesus in a friendly Mennonite church and quit wearing pants and adopted the plain, safe Mennonite culture, where children were shushed, not neglected, and the pleated skirts and double layered tops kept most of the lascivious boys away.

You know how this story goes. As I became a teenager, I began to see Sandi’s story and many others as simplistic. I discovered that some Mennonites wielded a spiritual abuse more

damaging than the physical abuse of Sandi. I realized that the Mennonite world could be my cage like Sandi's mother's neglect kept her caged in responsibility to her younger siblings. I urged my mother to get rid of her plethora of sentimental and moralizing literature. In their place, I met autobiographical fiction such as *Jane Eyre*, *East of Eden*, and *David Copperfield*. I sympathized with Jane's plain looks, looks that begged suspicious grown-ups to see her culpability in all her secretive actions. I cried over Cathy's sadistically lost soul in *East of Eden*. I pondered David's two marriages and wondered how many of my friends were finding themselves mildly dissatisfied with "the wife of their youth." I fell in love with the large universe of classic literature.

As a serious teenager, it was impossible for me not to wonder whether the complexity and subtlety of classic literature, so often missing from Mennonite literature, was an indictment against my community. Therefore, my identity and faith were in question. Were they, too, simplistic and narrow like a cage? Were the songs and stories that "we still have" not worth keeping, not worth celebrating?

The reading I did as a teenager and following high school influenced me to become a teacher. Without knowing it, I picked a profession that would force me to think through the questions that my broadened reading had introduced me to. I decided to attend a Mennonite junior college, one that offered an apprenticeship program in the K-12 day school next door. That's where I met Sarah.

Her name hadn't been Sarah for long, only a year. She never told me her first name. Sarah was the oldest of six children recently adopted and almost immediately abandoned by their adoptive mother. They were an African-American family, the only one in a school of white

Mennonites. She had met the conservative Mennonites only after adoption. As an apprentice to middle school, I took the opportunity of reading with her every day. The purpose of reading with her, my supervisor informed me, was not necessarily to improve her reading skills, but to build a relationship with the nearly silent girl and to change her opinion about women and reading.

It was a few weeks into the school year when we met for the first time. I smiled warmly at her. She looked at the floor. She walked stolidly next to me as we made our way down the white tiled floor with the blue trim to the library. “You can pick any book you want,” I told her, motioning to a stack of books the librarian had chosen as appropriate for a fifteen year old girl with stunted reading skills. The books probably included something like *Island of the Blue Dolphins* and *Number the Stars* and *Freedom Train: The Story of Harriet Tubman*. She looked at the books dully. I nervously chattered to her, hoping to help her choose a book, “This one is about a girl who has to survive by herself on an island, with only dolphins for company. Do you like dolphins?”

She grunted.

I swallowed and tried again. “This is about a girl who helps a Jewish family escape from the Nazis during World War II. Does that sound interesting?” My voice must have tilted high, trying to sound extra cheerful. I could tell they touched her as much as my brother’s books on electrical engineering touched me. Finally, I shrugged and left her alone with the pile. Disinterestedly, she shoved the first few books off the top. I groaned when I saw the book her fingers landed on.

“What’s this one?” she grunted this out, only betraying her interest in her first effort to speak.

I tried to make it sound as depressing as possible. “It’s about a little girl whose mother neglected her. I don’t remember much about the book. I just remember that she cut herself badly trying to open a pack of hotdogs.”

Since my favorite book for this age group was L’Engle’s *A Wrinkle in Time*, to my ears, this description sounded sufficiently dreary and repulsive.

“I want this one.” Her voice lifted a bit from the gravelly, unused tone she had been using.

I groaned inside, dreading being confronted with the moralizing and sentimental writing I remembered. And at the rate she read, I thought, this might be the only book we finish this year. It was thick, much thicker than the others. “Are you sure? It’s a really sad story.” I was unnecessarily hopeful that this would deter her.

“I want this one.” Her voice slanted downward in finality.

Picking up the book, I smiled wanly, and we headed back down the white-tiled floor with the blue trim toward an unused classroom. She woodenly marched beside me.

We found the assigned classroom. It was a high ceilinged biology classroom, with beakers sitting on the counters and noise cancellation wall panels. The emptiness made it difficult to select seats, so I clutched at the first ones, pulling out two chairs at a round table. She sat down without flourish.

We opened the book that day, and read by pages. She read a page, and I read a page. She read haltingly, but with meaning. Not emotion, but meaning. We read for days, and each day, in that silent classroom. I tried to befriend her. I tried all the tricks I had seen my friends use at the local kids clubs, where they taught kids from the project about Jesus and crafts and crazy songs

with dubious spirituality. I joked with her, but she sat there like a rock. I asked her if she could understand the way Sandi felt, and she nodded.

“My dad don’t love me,” she strayed off topic one day, and since I couldn’t fathom this, I argued with her. She just laughed at me, and refused to say anything more. I spoke with her homeroom teacher, and he shook his head.

“In all the conferences I’ve had with him, and I’ve had many, he indicates that he loves them. I believe him, but that household is strung tight.” The man was in love with his own words, so he shook his head and repeated himself. “Strung tight. There’re a lot of beatings in that home, especially since the mother left. Lots of beatings. He’s working a full-time job and trying to raise six new children. Sarah’s not her real name, you know. It’s only been her name for about a year now, since she’s been adopted.” He didn’t offer any more comfort.

I went away from the conversation, unhelpfully judging it by my own experience. I understood the beatings; my family was also “strung tight,” and I knew that could either toughen the children or damage them deeply. But I was more bothered by her name change. My unique name is an important part of my identity. I was sure her identity was as hidden as her first name.

We kept on meeting. We slogged through the misery of Sandi’s childhood, exacerbated by the slogging of Sarah’s reading. She showed real, uninhibited emotion for the first time on the day we read about Sandi’s tragic wrist slitting. It happened to be her turn to read, and I had bitten my lip, not sure she would follow details. Of course, this was condescending. She gasped in surprise and horror, followed by questions about the severity of the incident. The incident won her heart, and she never belabored over Sandi’s many subsequent trials.

One week, she missed two days. She was sick with pneumonia.

The next week, I inquired how she was and how her time was at home. She shrugged her shoulder, “All right.” I dug deeper, inquiring who stayed with her.

“My dad did,” she said matter-of-factly. This was surprising news, since I knew he was a single parent without a lot of resources. “Yeah,” she giggled, “he was so worried I would die. He just stared and stared at me with these big eyes.” She didn’t seem sympathetic.

I jumped on this bit of information. “You see, he does care about you!” I explained helpfully.

She kept on giggling, unpitying.

Near the end of the book, we came upon a trope common to Mennonite books. Sandi first converts to Christianity, then to the Mennonite denomination when she begins to search for people who read the Bible more literally. She is attracted to their homemade, modest dresses. When we read these pages, Sarah smirked with a choke in her throat. We read on, and I looked at her curiously, trying to invite her to talk. She never said anything, just laughed when Sandi praised her first double-layered, homemade dress. She snorted when Sandi tried to cook mashed potatoes for the first time in order to be a good Mennonite wife.

It was a genuine laugh, like *why is this nice person that I’ve fallen in love with doing all these crazy things?*

We kept on reading. Fortunately, around March, we finished the tortuous journey through Sandi’s journey toward hope. This time, I didn’t give her an option of which book to read. I felt as if my sacrifice, enduring Sandi’s moralizing, was sufficient. I produced *Dacey’s Song* by Cynthia Voigt. This story was also about an oldest daughter, abandoned by her mother in death, who travels with her three younger siblings to her mother’s estranged mother, their grandmother.

I worried the theme of abandonment would be too much. I needn't have worried. She loved this book just as much.

By this time, her range of emotions and comments on the stories had grown dramatically. She still kept personal comments to a minimum, but she didn't mince words about the characters in the story. "I like Dicey," she'd say.

"But do you like Dicey's grandmother?" I pushed back. Of course she liked Dicey; she was the brave heroine who looked out for her little siblings while on the run. I wondered what Sarah would do with an adult who at first was cold and stern with her grandchildren. She shrugged.

Dicey's little sister Maybeth is "slow." Dicey worries about her. Her grandmother takes the "tough" approach to raising her grandchildren, and Dicey doesn't see Maybeth flourish in anything but her music. Maybeth loves to sing. Dicey meets Jeff, to whom she is drawn because he plays a guitar soulfully. This is, after all, a book for teens. Music brings together disparate people in Dicey's life, Maybeth and Jeff, and later, their grandmother.

We never finished the book. The school year ended, and I graduated from the apprenticeship program. I gave her a copy of the book as a gift and wrote an inscription in the front. She thanked me in an uninspiring fashion, and I hugged her awkwardly. She plodded away from me in the pink dress with the flat collar and puffy bodice that she wore nearly every day of our meetings. She looked back to smile, though, as if she learned to love me like she loved Sandi and Dicey.

Meeting Sarah and reading with her forced me to re-evaluate *Sandi's Anchor of Hope*. I still didn't love the story, but I recognized that Sandi's story intersected with Sarah's story in some way that she never shared with me. It lacked complexity, but the book's simplicity may be

what allowed her to follow through 259 pages. It was even moralizing, but Sarah recognized it and didn't internalize the more pedantic themes. Through Sarah, I began to see why we "still have their songs." She perceived Sandi's song of hope, as well as Dicey's song, the one that brought her family together. This told me that I could take a closer look at Martin of Villgraten's song. If I'd do so, I'd find words that seem sweetly appropriate, if not original.

Oh God, so rich in grace,
Preserve us, Your children,
That we do not depart from You.
Those who are surrendered to You,
That they do not come to shame,
Lead them diligently
With your right hand
Into the promised land,
The eternal Kingdom of Heaven. (46-54)

Martin of Villgraten, before his death, also penned words of hope, hope brought on by a humble recognition of his own weakness. Yet, like Martin of Villgraten, Sarah and I, her condescending mentor, could be redeemed. Sarah taught me that the miracle of redemption, though veiled at times, can be found even in the pedantic but earnest literature of my ancestors.

Slow Singing

As mentioned before, the *Ausbund* contains many martyr stories. These martyrs are the heroes for all Amish and Mennonites today. Most interesting of all of these is Hans Haslibacher, about whom the last song is written. According to the story, Haslibacher was a martyr near Bern, facing death, when he prophesied three signs about his death. *Songs of the Ausbund* details them like this: “his head would jump into his hat and laugh, the sun would turn blood-red, and the town well would give forth blood” (The Translation Committee 347). The song details these events happening, and most Amish believe it occurred as the song tells them.

Seven stories refer to specific martyrs by name. Out of those seven, four mention only one person. One of those is the famous Hans Haslibacher. Two others feature males. The fourth features Elizabeth of Leewarden. The song’s author remains anonymous. The poem is written with more lilting rhythm than some.

Ein Mägdelein von Gliedern zart,	A young maiden with features fair,
Lieblich, schön und von gutter Art,	Pleasant, lovely, and well-mannered,
Elisabeth ward sie genannt,	Elizabeth, she was named,
Die hat auch Gottes Wort erlannt. (1-4)	She also professed the Word of God.

This stanza mentions her looks, but the rest of the song details her work in teaching, and her dedication to the Anabaptist faith, despite having screws applied to both knees and being threatened with nakedness.

It doesn’t surprise me that one of these songs is only about a woman. My father, an aficionado of *The Martyr’s Mirror*, a cheerful coffee table book about martyrs of all Christian denominations, has told me about women who drowned in barrels, or endured the heat of death’s fire.

But if the Amish do sing this song, it must impact them. It's difficult to be flippant about the words of these songs as they are sung. Let me tell you about the way they sing.

Amish singing could be likened to a swarm of insistent bees buzzing, or to an ethereal army of bovines, lowing in soft, guttural tones. Their actual mode of singing is as interesting as their lyrics. Every stranger who has visited them has commented on their melodies. For many Amish, the uniqueness of their singing can be a source of shame because of its inexplicable slowness. For most people, the words, "slow tunes" will evoke memories of their grandmother slowly drawling, "Amazing Grace" or Handel's "Largo" from *Xerxes*. Let me please disambiguate. The first two words of "Amazing Grace," sung as an Amish slow song, could easily take ten seconds. Every Amish song takes longer to sing than "American Pie", one of the longer pieces of pop music, topping out at eight minutes and thirty-two seconds. In fact, most selections within the *Ausbund* could easily take up to thirty minutes if they were completed.

I like to think about the Amish singing about Elizabeth of Leewarden for thirty minutes on a Sunday morning, moaning through the details of screws being applied to her legs, her shame at being unclothed, her last words of grace. I like to think about the Amish singing about Elizabeth of Leewarden because the Amish are a very patriarchal society.

Not every Amish and conservative Mennonite family places women into inferior positions.

However, much of Amish culture does place women into an inferior position. For example, when my grandfather and grandmother went anywhere with their eight children, my grandfather and his oldest sons sat in the front seat of the surrey, while my grandmother

squeezed in the airless, cramped backseat. When I questioned my mother why this happened, my mother said that all the Amish ride this way. I'm glad to note this practice has changed since my mother was young. Only the most traditional Amish continue the practice. But many others practices like this remain.

In the Amish circles, no women teach men. A wife is often told to submit to her husband's leadership. I've seen a mother cry, but not challenge, when a father threatened to disown his son. It's not at all unusual for a woman to walk several paces behind her husband in a town. A working Amish wife is frowned upon, and there is public outrage if she continues to work outside the home after she has children. Even in genealogy books, perhaps in the most telling way, the women are always listed under their husband's name, even if the relation is on her side.

The men and women's spheres hardly overlap like a Venn diagram that describes many other traditionally gendered communities. There's a social gap between the genders so wide that their large families seem to derive from immaculate conception.

But on Sunday mornings, the men who can't meet a strange woman's gaze sing about Elizabeth of Leewarden.

The Amish are not the only people with strange traditions. But two things make their traditions powerful: first, their isolation, and consequent endurance, and secondly, their ability to create spiritual explanations for their tradition. Only in the last fifty years have the Amish begun to consider non-spiritual explanations for some of their traditions.

The *Ausbund* does not have notes to indicate the melodies or harmonies sung. Instead, they remember the tunes they've always sung, for over five hundred years. But not even a group

as isolated and traditional as the Amish can retain something as ethereal as a tune without notation for that long. William Schreibner, who wrote one of the more comprehensive texts on Amish music, calls the Amish “richer in texts than in melodies.” His article, “The Hymns of the Amish *Ausbund* in Philological and Literary Perspective” stands in stark contrast in its thoughtful approach, opposing the inattentive evolution of the Amish melodic tradition. He references John Humble who conducted field research and managed to illustrate the tunes’ “kinship to the early folk ballad style”, and Rudolf Wolkan, who claimed are the tunes of the *Ausbund* were among the “best sixteenth century folklore tradition” (Schreibner 39). Despite these tentative praises, the Amish singing today still doesn’t show too much of a connection with those early folk ballads.

Like many other isolated folk groups, Amish music has evolved into a unique style. The Amish sing each word through in a series of syllables or diphthongs, before moving onto the next. This unhurried method calls for a leader, who leads out not just the beginning of the song, but each line. The “liner” is chosen for his confidence. His first notes are sung by himself, usually in a strong, primal tone. “O-o-o-o-o” and his voice may shift upwards in pitch. “G-o-o-o-o-tt” and the rest of the congregation join him. Their sounds harmonize, don’t harmonize, and all are in an unpretentious lower register of their voice that does not belie their manual labor or earnest, literal reading of Scripture. It’s up to the listener to interpret it as either a miasma of confusion or a bolstering zephyr of calm.

I wonder how often song leaders choose Elizabeth’s song. I wonder if they discuss her bravery, her example as a teacher. I am a teacher, and in no universe could I conceive of the

Amish men slowly and melodically extolling the spiritual nobility of me or a woman in my position.

I believe I was sitting in my first Amish church service, on a school assignment for an Anabaptist Worldview class, when I first wondered whether Amish singing is calm or confusion. I'd been to Amish services before, weddings and funerals, but never a traditional Sunday morning service. The Amish woman I sat next to sang confidently, her alto harmonies infused with her whole body tone.

She sang,

O Gott Vater, wir loben dich,

O God Father, we praise You

Und deine Güte preifen:

And Your goodness exalt,

Die du, o Herr, so gnädiglich,

Which You, O Lord, so graciously

Un uns neu hast bewiesen. (Song 131, 1-4)

Have manifested to us anew. (1-4)

She dropped her consonants into the song sure, sure footed as a goat in native mountains. In my head, I heard altos in my Mennonite church singing with tones so breathy the articulation was almost completely lost, till it sounded like this:

B-essed assurance, Jesus is mi-i-i . . .

. . . what a fortune of glory divi-i- . . .

Heir of salvation, purchase of l-o- . . .

Born in His spirit, washed in his blo-o-o.

Their songs lacked ending consonants and confidence, as if the harshness of consonants, so loved in German, would taint the sweetness of Jesus's salvation. My choral training told me they lacked breath support and that if they quit hugging their stomachs and allowed their bosoms to settle high in front of their shoulders they could have more breath, more sound, more strength.

I loved the strength, the enduring length of the Amish singing. I wondered how it got that way.

I wondered if the strength, the length of the Amish songs indicated the strength of their tradition. I wondered if the women's strong voices contradicted their lives at home.

I've heard several explanations for their stretched out tunes. Supposedly, one woman in my church told me, they (the early Anabaptists) had to sing slowly in an effort to disguise the religious nature of their songs when they hid in their house churches and sang. Apparently, the state's police would be roused to suspicion by folk tunes sung with religious words, but not if a slow and separated melody wafted out, words made unrecognizable by their length. I raised my eyebrows questioningly and nodded agreeably, a mannerism that has become nearly second nature to me. Another man explained to me that the slowness was an indication of their piety. Again, the raised eyebrows and agreeable nod, this time with an obligatory murmur for his kindness in explaining things to me.

Is it melodramatic to say that the question haunted me? I knew the source of the other strange traditions of the Amish. I knew about Jacob Ammon, the tailor who founded the group, dictated their uniform and plain clothing. I knew their head veilings arose out of a literal interpretation of I Corinthians 11. I knew their lack of technology helped to keep them separate and non-conformed. But the slow, singular manner of singing? I had no answer.

I questioned the style of singing, but I didn't question other traditions, traditions that had evolved just as slowly as their method of singing. Jackson, in his article entitled, "The Strange Music of the Old Order Amish eloquently explains their style:

It is a common observation that groups sing more slowly [than individuals]. And when the group is uncontrolled (by instrument, director, or notation) it drags still more . . . The

human vocal apparatus does not seem to be able to hold to a given note very long without letting down, breaking over into some sort of pitch variation. Hence the singer, holding as best he can to any given tone while waiting till the group-mind decides to sing the next tune-tone, tends to waver up and down. If the wobbling-about remained the self-relief of one person among the many singing together, it might well be neglected by the recorder of the group. But it doesn't remain thus. The relief of one tends to become the relief of many. The many tend to waver along similar lines, and a singing *manner* is born—or evolves. (“Tunes” 14-15)

This information was pointed toward the style of singing, but to me, it shed light on nearly my entire existence as a spiritual descendent of the Amish. Much of the traditions of the Amish devolved into a peculiar manner, explained spiritually, but actually a product of thoughtless tradition.

For instance, when I grew up in a Mennonite school, men always taught middle and high school. My last female teacher was in sixth grade, and when she began having discipline troubles, I overheard grave school board members speak to one another about the need for a “man’s touch” in those grades. They hinted that perhaps the fact that I Timothy 2:12’s injunction, “I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet,” should be applied to ten and eleven year olds when disorder threatened. They spiritualized a tradition. Despite this, the school permitted an interim pair of women to co-teach a high school classroom in the absence of a qualified male; and no one could argue that the year had been anything but highly successful.

So when I attempted to get my first teaching job, I thrilled to teach nine and ten year olds. I thought they were adorable until I realized I had to teach them how to blow their nose, sit in a

chair, and discuss syllable and long division with them for weeks. I didn't enjoy anything about teaching them except their marvelous creativity. I knew, instead, that I wanted to teach students to read Shakespeare playfully, to discuss with them the ambiguities and subversions of modern poetry, to analyze the conservative/liberal divide that occurred in the French Revolution, in the Congress of Vienna, and in our own country in the 1980s. I also wanted to explain to them how my unique community of Christians fit into the larger Christian story, one we had been separated from for so long. But no precedent of women teaching upper classmen existed in my small world for me to follow. I had seen no female teachers teach those subjects, and I scarcely knew a woman who cared about those subjects. I supposed that my interest in those subjects, my desire to teach them, was somehow shameful, overreaching, self-aggrandizing.

I won't detail my journey to achieve my goals, to teach those subjects that are dear to my heart. The sky did not part and shine its enlightenment on my life in one day. Instead, I made many small decisions that continued to open up the world to me in bigger and bigger ways. I moved to another state to teach middle school. I fought against the devolvement of tradition. I encouraged my experienced co-worker to share her opinion more freely. I learned to seek out people on the fringes of my culture, ones that were willing to be adaptive. I met a pastor's wife who is going through seminary. The people on the fringes of my culture were among the most encouraging.

Today, I teach high school English and history. I try to be like Elizabeth of Leewarden. I try to become known for teaching issues that I care about. I try to confront conventional gender views expressed by my students, ones that had me ashamed and unhappy with myself. I also try to give them opportunities to vocalize their opinions, opportunities to let them listen to their own logic. Mostly, I give them a space to acknowledge that the traditions that shape us and me are

mysterious and wonderful. Most are not sacred. Some, like Elizabeth's example in the *Ausbund*, give us heroes and encourage us to more noble sacrifices. Others, like the slowly evolving gender roles and slower singing, may be less helpful and too comfortable, literally dragging us down. They drag like a wooden plow in wet dirt.

State and church authorities of sixteenth century Switzerland tortured Elizabeth of Leewarden because she questioned traditions. According to the songwriter, her interlocutors asked her, "What, finally, do you / Think of mass and sacrament" (35-36)? Her words, pressed rhythmically into place by an unknown songwriter, are not eloquent: "You have in this no foundation, / The scriptures make no mention of it, / Therefore I think it certainly is not good" (38-40). In turn, her persecutors told her, "The devil speaks out of your mouth" (51). Elizabeth of Leewarden hadn't heard of silencing tactics, but fortunately for her spiritual descendants, she knew what to do with it. "She spoke with words thus plainly . . . 'Of this I have no doubt'" (53, 56). She refused to be silenced.

I haven't seen many women in my community stand up to shaming or silencing tactics. I haven't seen many women willing to pursue interests outside of their strict gender roles. However, my history does include women standing up to these tactics. Every one of the thirty-three martyrs mentioned in the *Ausbund* was an independent thinker, willing to change traditions he or she perceived to be wrong. Today, I have their example to change the world around me—if not as a martyr, then as a teacher.

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Self-Analysis of

“Sketching the Stories of the Ausbund”

Writing about the *Ausbund* gave me my first opportunity to write creative non-fiction about my community in a way which incorporated historical research. As a person who loves research and creative non-fiction, I loved the new pathways I was able to take. As a person from a unique folk and religious community, it sometimes feels impossible to tell the stories of my life and those of people around me.

It feels difficult for a number of reasons. For one, ever since American culture has shifted away from an agrarian lifestyle to an urban one, the Amish and conservative Mennonites have come under the same sort of scrutiny that an exotic creature would come under. Since the 1980s and 1990s, my community, Holmes County, has become the largest Amish community in the world, receiving four million tourists each year to see our county of over 20,000 Amish. In addition to tourism, a sub-genre of Amish romance has grown rapidly, further commodifying and glamorizing the humble and traditional way of life that the Amish lead. This leads to a plethora of catch words for the community, words that include like *plain*, *buggies*, *worldliness*, and *Amish Mafia*. While many of these words are accurate to describe the values of the community, their over-usage creates a miasma of associations that are difficult to break free of. While *plain* may accurately draw up images of homemade clothing in a style from one hundred years ago, the plainness of the community extends to their food, speech, Sunday morning services, and most valued appearance. I felt like it was especially important to avoid these staple words in order to create fresh images not tainted by the “dross” of the tourist and romance fiction industries.

Another problem that I ran into was the difficulty of creating accurate and relevant images and scenes from my community that many people could relate to. I am a conservative

Mennonite, a denomination that's closely tied with the Amish but that consists of only a few hundred thousand people in North America. Like members of different nerd subcultures or Chickasaw Nation of Oklahoma, conservative Mennonites can fight the internal perception that their cultural stories will not be relevant to the larger American or international population. However, this problem can be turned into a benefit, for all stories, whether they're told by a white Protestant male or conservative Mennonite woman, need to achieve a certain amount of universality in order to become a good story.

A related difficulty was accurately "translating" this religious, folk culture into stories that non-religious or non-Christian, urban audiences could understand. How does one accurately describe the fashion conveyed by a puffy pink, double-layered dress, as Sarah wore in one of my stories? It had elastic at the waist. In my culture, this sort of dress is immediately known to be from the 1980s, or early 1990s, where bouffant styles were popular everywhere, but are now only available at thrift stores or from well-meaning people's closets. How does one accurately describe the shame I felt and still feel when I give my opinion on a non-female matter such as politics? Worse yet is when a male disagrees with me, for I feel it to my bones that the male is right, no matter how recently I've read up on the matter. The feminist community talks about these sorts of instances, and articles like "Rebecca Solnit: Men Explain Things to Me" slowly drive the shame out through relatability and commonality.

The second difficulty that I ran into consisted of the tenuous bond between my stories and the *Ausbund*. I'm fairly certain that the effects of the *Ausbund's* legacy remains strong in my community where nearly everyone is either Amish and still using it every Sunday service, or related to the Amish, or descended from the Amish. However, the exact correlation was still difficult to prove. I also ran into a difficulty when I talked about Sarah, a girl who had only been

a part of my community for a year when I met her. I wanted to prove that in the stories I told, the *Ausbund's* unique heritage of telling stories of relatively unimportant people in relatively unskillful ways was still a heritage that held power today. I tried to do so by telling how a book from a tiny, Mennonite publishing house had the power to grab the heart of an abused and stoic girl. I could have, however, talked about the *Budget*, a weekly newspaper based in my area to which Amish and conservative Mennonites from all over the world can write and tell the stories of their week. The authors use improper grammar and tell stories that are sometimes laughable with common tropes that include animals escaping enclosures or sly, chaste innuendos announcing the beginning of a courtship. I could have talked about my grandfather's obsession with genealogy and how, until he was middle-aged, he knew a little something about every person in Holmes County, which church they attended, their maternal grandfather, their reputation to breed horses well. I could have talked about one of the hundreds of stories my mother has told me about people I've never known, usually told over cold cereal at 6:30 in the morning. But I had to start somewhere, and Sarah's story had stayed with me for six years, and so seemed to be a good choice.

In the second story, I wished to talk about the fascinating tradition of singing slowly in the Amish church services. As a choral musician and history and anthropology enthusiast, I've never heard anything like it, although its uniqueness reminds me of Inuit throat singing. I also wanted to talk about what it has been like to become a woman with four to eight years more education than nearly everyone in my local congregation and workplace. Just like the Amish way of singing became burdened with the passage of time, I felt as if the gender roles in my community had devolved into something that didn't reflect any careful thought or logic, but was faulty tradition built on faulty tradition. But however strongly one feels about the cultural connection

between gender roles and “slow tunes,” the topics are far apart and difficult to bring together. Despite the difficulty, the chance to have my own platform in which to attempt to prove the connection was satisfying and educational.

Finally, I’d like to talk about the difficult and satisfyingly tricky maze of talking about complex web of negative and positive cultural traits that were tied up in the *Ausbund*. I discovered the limited scope of the *Ausbund*, a scope that could be related to the Amish and conservative Mennonite lifestyle today, with their isolation and conservatism. However, I knew, and rediscovered, the earnestness, the sacrifice, and the love that the martyrs of ballads displayed that are still an important part of my family, of my gender-marginalized culture. *Sandi’s Anchor of Hope* is popular in many Amish and conservative Mennonite circles, but it could be called narrow-minded because Sandi’s search for salvation leads her to pass through non-Mennonite churches until she finds grace in the Mennonite tradition. The veiled insinuation that Protestants and Catholics cannot find a true salvation mimics the early Anabaptist belief in a pure, or distinct church. The early Anabaptists meant that people should be willing to give their life as many of them were called to do, but today, the pure and visible church often takes on its definition through outward traditions like conservative dress, the prayer veiling, and sexual abstinence before marriage. Perhaps what Sandi and others should have identified as the point of purity and visibility is the devout spirit that some Anabaptist churches display.

The difficulty shown in the previous paragraph is not unlike the difficulties of talking about a hymnbook that contains at once sympathetic martyrs and awkward technique, such as rhyme that creates a new language, or rhythm that tends toward the tedious. One must hold the honest example of the sacrifice of the martyrs in tension with the clumsy way with which their stories were handled. Similarly, the greatest strength of the Anabaptist culture, their history of

martyrdom, has become their greatest weakness, but pointing it out plainly in stories would almost certainly bring only hurt and confusion to a person immersed in the culture. The early Anabaptists can be hailed as heroes because of their devoutness and honesty, two traits which led thousands of them to be killed in religious persecution. However, the persecution and continued remembrance of it in stories and in the *Ausbund* has created a culture obsessed with religious persecution and a safe relationship with governments. Many Amish and conservative Mennonites believe that at any minute, the United States government that has granted them quite a lot of religious freedom for two to three hundred years will turn and jail them for sharing their faith. The latest concrete example of the U.S. government infringing on their religious freedoms occurred during World War I, where two Hutterite conscientious objectors were beaten and died as a result of torture. To many, this incident remains in fresh and vivid memory. One could easily argue that their fear of persecution has led them to create communities unconcerned with relevancy and instead concerned on safety and preservation, much like the diverted concerns of an abused child.

On the other hand, studying the *Ausbund* and the themes and individual stories of martyrs, as well as statements of faith and praise to God was an inspiration. Thanks to my parents who were raised Amish until their teen years, to pastors who were raised Amish, my life has been drenched in references to the hymnbook as a source of inspiration. Studying the book for myself gave me the opportunity to see the beauty of every person's story.