

Breaking Barriers

everybody belongs everybody serves

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✠ A Ministry of Christian Reformed Disability Concerns



Photo by Heidi Dru Kortman

Today I Jumped

Patricia Haveman

We almost didn't go:
a soccer game of 6-year-olds,
a sandwich grabbed at home,
a shopping mall to buy some books,
a stop to watch some basketball.
"Oma,* shall we skip the beach?"
"No, please, I'd like to see the lake."

Ah, yes, a late September swim!
I tossed aside my faithful cane
and shuffled through the sand.
I walked into the rippling waves
till water reached my waist.
I turned to face the folks on shore
thumbs up and smiles and cheers.

Then, in a flash, a whitecap formed
and bumped me from behind.
It made me jump!
Both feet went up at once!
It nudged me up and up again!

I hadn't jumped in years!
my toes tingled
my body bounced
my eyes cried
my soul sang.

For a fleeting, moving moment
the nimble me returned.

I remembered and rejoiced!

Today, I jumped!

* "Oma" is the Dutch word for *grandma*.

▶ theme

This *Breaking Barriers* issue celebrates artistic expression. Special thanks to Curt Gesch and Jena Vander Ploeg who helped with editing and to Jake Moerdyke who suggested the idea. Our next issue will focus on Down Syndrome, and the summer issue will reflect on mental health. Deadlines for these issues are January 15 and April 15, respectively. **If you or a loved one has Down syndrome or has dealt with mental health issues, please tell us your story.** Items can be sent to disabilityconcerns@crcna.org, or see our physical address on page 2. Letters also are always welcome. Please do not submit anything longer than 500 words; all items may be edited for appropriateness and length.

Taste and see . . .

Mark Stephenson, Director of Disability Concerns

The arts can enrich life. The literary virtuosity and visual beauty in this issue of *Breaking Barriers* deepen our joy, give us new insight into God's compassion and call, and enhance our appreciation for God and his people.

But art can be used for sinister purposes too. For over one hundred years, white actors in blackface advanced racial stereotypes and demeaned African Americans. Similarly, two recent movies advance stereotypes and demean people with disabilities: *Tropic Thunder* and *Blindness*. According to a statement by the Church of the Brethren, "Under the guise of 'parody,' *Tropic Thunder* insults and harms individuals with intellectual disabilities by repeated use of the 'R-word.' The movie perpetuates derogatory images and stereotypes of these individuals by mocking their physical appearance and speech, perpetuating inappropriate myths and misperceptions, and legitimizing painful discrimination, exclusion, and bullying." The National Federation of the Blind says of the movie *Blindness*, "Most members of the public do not know a blind person and may therefore assume that this portrayal of blindness is accurate and true. It is not, and the falsehoods in this film will damage the prospects for equal opportunity, productivity, dignity, and happiness for blind people throughout the world."

Please think of the works of art you find in this issue of *Breaking Barriers* as a kind of antidote to these movies and any other communication that promotes misunderstanding and even hatred toward our fellow human beings. As you drink in the delights of these pictures, poems, and stories, taste and see that the Lord is good and active among his people, including people living with disabilities of various kinds.

These are the artists:

Joanne Allott volunteers at the Bibles for Missions Thrift Store and attends a Friendship group in Brampton, Ontario.

Laura Bokma writes poetry in Nova Scotia and has struggled with disorganized schizophrenia.

Peter Davis, a sophomore at the College for Creative Studies in Detroit majoring in Animation and Digital Media, has Asperger syndrome.

Rich Dixon, a retired teacher, speaks and writes from his home base in Fort Collins, Colorado. His memoir, *Relentless Grace*, was released in November.

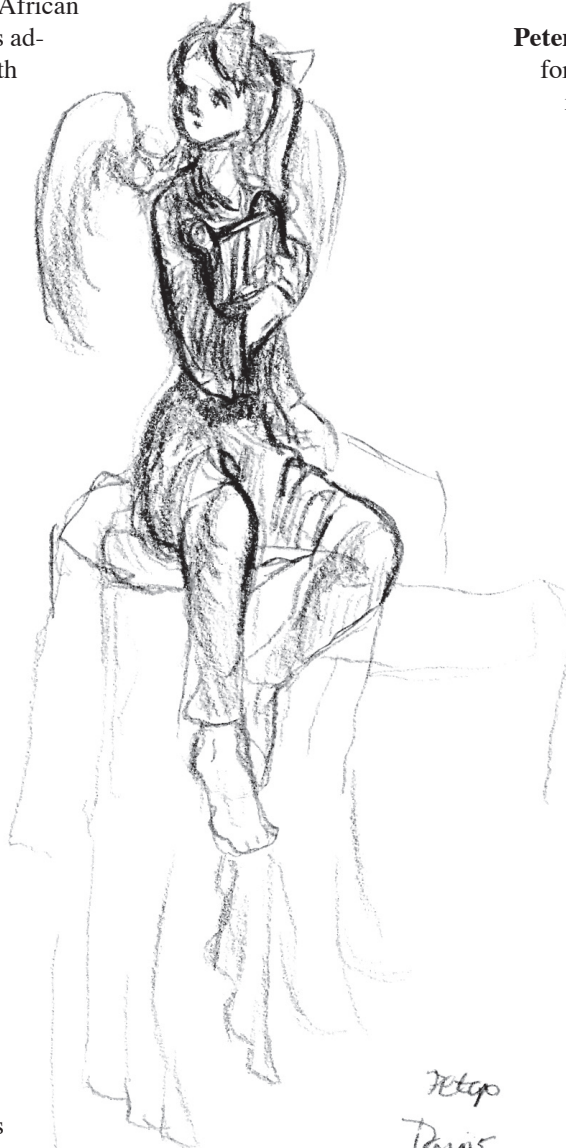
Curt Gesch recently came out of retirement and is teaching part time at Houston Christian School in Houston, British Columbia.

Patricia Haveman lives in Iowa and enjoys grandparenting whenever she can catch up with her grandchildren. She has lived with Parkinson's for about 10 years.

Heidi Dru Kortman, a writer living with cerebral palsy, began to learn photography this year as well.

Jake Moerdyke attends Grand Valley State University and has cerebral palsy.

Peter Schopfer is a magician, a food-safety educator, a remodeler of houses, and a master teacher. He is presently serving as elder in Telkwa Christian Reformed Church.



7/2/09
Davis

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My Real Mother

Joanne Allott

I have a Real Mother who
was Mentally ill.
(But I Still Loved Her)

She was very sick inside
with deep depression.
(But I Still Loved Her)

She had 8 children and two died.
(But I Still Loved Her)

I carried the depression from
my mother and other things too.
(But I Still Loved Her)

I never blamed my mother for
any sickness I have.
(Because I Still Loved Her)

Now she is no longer here. But I
think of her and (I Still Love Her).

Transformation

Heidi Dru Kortman

This stony attitude
Igneous, spotted with gray
Discontent, red rage,
Pink embarrassment and black
Despair—predictably volcanic
Vitrified granite hard.

Mere shaping and polishing
Barely make it useful.
There is no beauty in it.

Break it down, O Lord,
Hammer it, erode—though it take
years
To become fine sand.

Apply the furnace heat
Of your will and your Spirit
Melt all to transparency
A window to see you
A mirror to reflect you
A prism to display the spectrum
of your love and power.

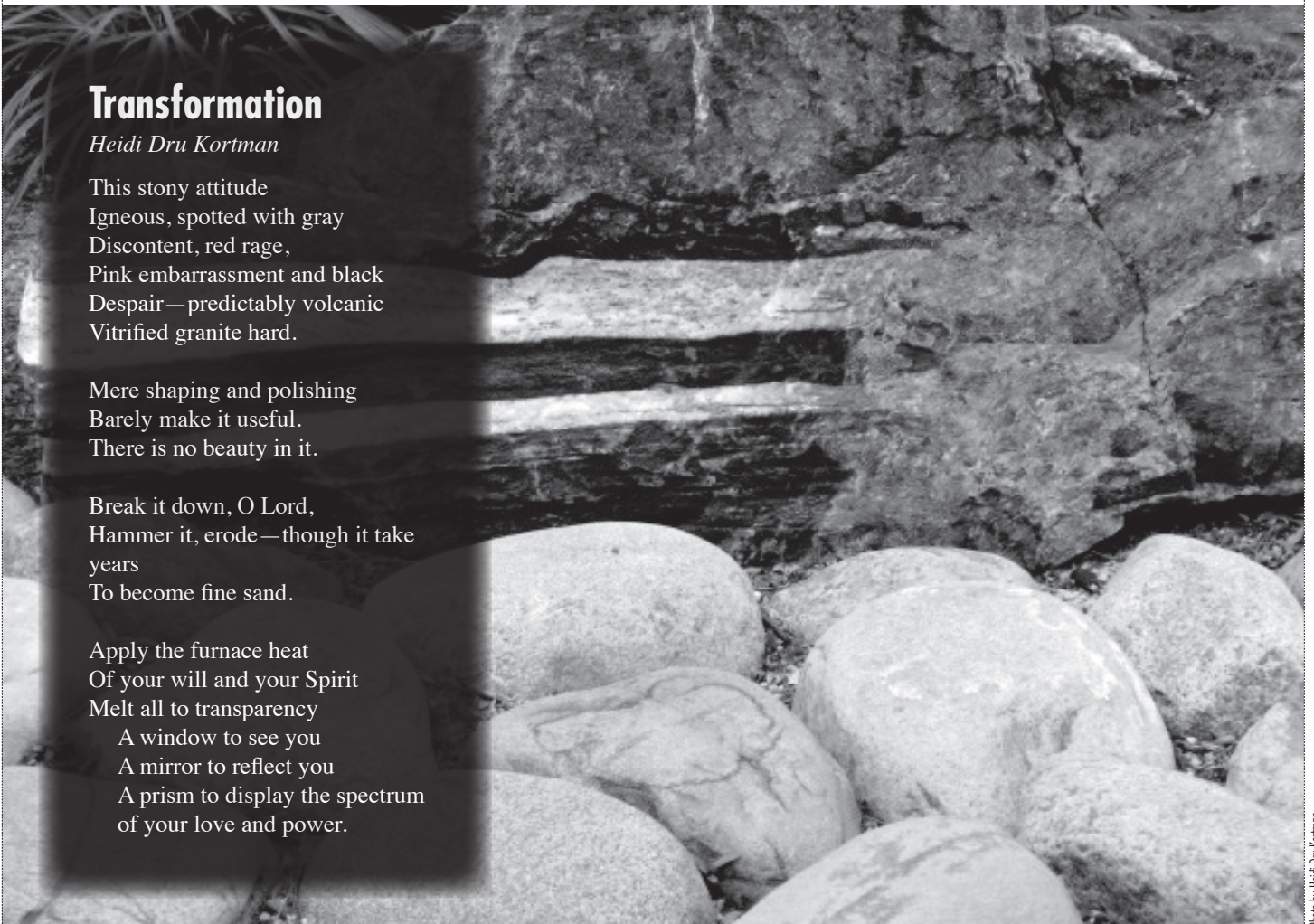


Photo by Heidi Dru Kortman



Photo by Heidi Dru Kortman

Depression

Peter Schopfer

Depression is a dark cloud that hovers, ever-present,
ready to tarnish the smallest of silver linings.
Depression takes every failure, even the most insignificant ones,
enlarges and then etches them deep and long into the ego.
At the same time, it decimates the value of any success,
robbing any potential moment of joy.
Depression is listening to well-meaning friends tell you
that only trust and faith are needed,
and then all will be well.
The brain already knows . . . But the heart and soul remain enfogged.
Depression is the shears used to cut Samson's hair.
Depression smothers libido, choking the most basic of drives,
and leaves one wanting—no needing—to be held by loved ones
and held forever.
No kisses or caresses; just a tight secure enfolding.
But mostly, depression is an enforced icy isolation.
No one can enter another's depression.
No one can understand.
Alcoholics have AA.
Widows and orphans have the church.
But the depressed has only a plastic pasted smile
behind which a lonely soul cries out with no one to hear,
no one to help, no one to comfort.
Only the fortunate foolish think that Hell is fire and brimstone.

Growler Bergs

Heidi Dru Kortman

Fragile paper schooner
Ambition's masts raked against the moon
Fly sails of tale and poem
Old Beaufort never knew
Most wash ashore, like jetsam.
Ink-black worded currents eddy round the rocks,
Trapping hopes an envelope at a time.
Flexible keel of being writhes and holds—
No pier in sight,
No incident nor reef yet enough on which to ground,
Then splinter.
Hull framed of limitations
Pegged tight by wooden desperation
A cargo hidden well below the Plimsoll mark.
The captain's habit of inertia is to blame.
This barren bay is no suitable port:
Growler bergs pose threat to fragile planks,
Buoyant dreams still hold together.
Lone crewman plods to turn the capstan round the
post of inspiration.

Pants for that breath, draws linked regret one coil at a turn.
These doldrum days must pass, past time to set the boom a-swing,
To reach, reach out before the wind, flee the silent freezing
Seek safety in the active waves.



Photo by Heidi Dru Kortman

Dandelion Snow

Laura Bokma

I was up on a hill, tethering at twilight
The sweet-smelling grass that was neatly raked in rows.
The tractor's tether tips were messing with all their might,
When suddenly a winsome wonder came into sight:
Under the grass, dandelions were below,
And the tether threw like feathers the dandelion snow—
Fluffy puffs, falling up—yes! Up they go,
Reflecting the sun's shining fire-gold light.

Doesn't God the Father also drive the tether tractor occasionally?
For up on a hill, as a small seed planted deep in the ground,
We grow and grow like a weed, below an orderly canopy.
But then a tether-trial, like a thorn, comes suddenly
And pierces our lifeline, throws our peace of mind, till nothing is sound!
Our fists we shake at him who makes,
 yet we knew not to the earth we were bound.
Now through suffering, the path to heaven we have found!
Pure as snow, up we go! Yes, we are falling up, you see!
Reflecting the golden majesty of the Son almighty!

Photo by Heidi Dru Kortman



Photo by Heidi Dru Kortman

On Being Disabled

Curt Gesch

like chloroplasts
you dominate
cloak, hide, stifle
my small glow
until with fall
you die . . .
and my small
glory
yellow
or even gold
gets its
day before
joining you
in a heaven
that is
surprisingly
not green
but golden

Heaven

Rich Dixon

I awake in total stillness, no customary hospital noises. I seem to float in a dark void. I don't attempt movement or words, just rest in peaceful silence.

I'm not afraid. Peace. I close my eyes for a moment, or for a long time.

Eyes open again, the same serene blackness, but I perceive a vague shadow.

Someone stands beside me—a presence felt more than seen, completely still, head bowed. I sense he is praying. I close my eyes, for a moment or a lifetime.

He's still there, immersed in prayer. Muted details, just the motionless silhouette, so calm I almost hear his thoughts.

Everything seems restful and right—there is no need to know. I belong here. Love has wrapped its arms around me.

It's Jesus! Jesus is beside me. I've died. I'm in heaven. Jesus is praying over me. No fear, no questions—no excitement, wonder, or sadness. Everything radiates serenity. Safe; no more pain or fear. I take a deep breath and smile.

Sunlight streams through open blinds. "Morning, Rich. You had a tough night."

I try to banish confusion. Oh, yeah. Hospital, pneumonia.

I'm still in room 3057, about as far as possible from heaven.

"You had a bad evening. The docs changed antibiotics, but no improvement. They called your pastor, and he stayed through the night."

I smile to myself. So that's who it was, my friend and pastor Al Helder.

The pneumonia receded. It must have been the antibiotics.

But that's not my explanation. In the face of unspeakable terror, I experienced certainty that Jesus stood beside me. In the end, the power of that encounter would alter the course of my life.

In December 1987 I fell while installing Christmas lights. In the weeks following my spinal cord injury, a range of physical concerns required attention: breathing, circulation, skin care, bladder/bowel, kidneys, even keeping toenails healthy. I retained minimal arm use but couldn't even roll myself over in bed. I lacked motivation and tended to stay in bed a lot. Eventually I developed pneumonia. As the infection progressed, lethargy increased and I lapsed into a semi-coma.



Photo by Heidi Dru Kortman

Lonely Mittens—A Counting Rhyme

Heidi Dru Kortman

One lonely mitten, waiting for more
“Cling” goes my knitting needle down on the floor.

Two lonely mittens, waiting for the others
Their eager boy has four smaller brothers.

Three lonely mittens, waiting for the fourth
When it gets made, there'll be snow forts.

Four lonely mittens, waiting to be five
I'd better knit it quickly, keep the winter fun alive.

Five lonely mittens finally are six
Watch three happy brothers playing snowball tricks!

Seven lonely mittens, piled near the door
One is in the parking lot, at the grocery store.

Eight lonely mittens, two with holes, are old
They'll be for the snowman; he won't mind the cold.

Nine lonely mittens, dripping from the line,
One is in a snow bank—who will say, “That's mine”?

Ten lonely mittens, waiting in a box
All the snow has melted, and the children play with blocks.

Nine lonely mittens, yellow, blue, and red
Isn't there another one, underneath the bed?

Eight lonely mittens, waiting for the snow
It will not be very long before the cold winds blow.

Seven lonely mittens, the kitten played with one
It started out in perfect shape, but now it has no thumb.

Six lonely mittens, someone's hands have grown!
Call the knitting auntie. Quick, pick up the phone!

Five lonely mittens, the children count each flake
If flakes by billions fall tonight, a record is at stake.

Four knitting needles, silvery and quick
Make the needed mittens cozy, warm, and thick.

Three lonely mittens, “I found one with stripes.”
If the stripes are green ones, we know that it is Mike's.

Two lonely mittens, sitting on a shelf
Waiting for their owner to find them for herself.

One knitting auntie has her yearly plans
To be sure the children have warm and cozy hands.

Only Waiting

Jake Moerdyke

Song Part: E, A, B

I've never been so afraid of the sunset.
I've never been so afraid to fight off the darkness.
From where I sit,
How could anything ever go back to being the same?
With my feet in the ever colder sand?
I scream, and call out his name.
Has it been so long since we've seen the rays of the son now
That this entire world
Has turned itself upside down?
I feel lost, and I don't know why.
So once again his name I cry.
I can't sit anymore and wait to be found.
If this faith is to be mine, I realize
I must find it on my own.
The table creaks, and the ground shifts as I slowly stand.
And to the red sky contrasting dark clouds
I throw my hands.
Then a deep tone disperses itself through the air
Coming from the music playing
Right over there.
I don't know where these words come from,
But in the cold sunset
They seem to fit this song:

"So tell me, are you afraid of the sunrise,
Because it begins another day of pain in your life?
How could anything ever be the same
With your feet deep in the sand?
Just call his name . . ."

I'll tell you, I am afraid of the sunset,
Because the darkness consumes us from where we sit.
Haven't we seen the son in so long now?
What's the point in only waiting for the savior to come back down?

We gotta go somewhere before right now.
We gotta do something before we start to fall down.
But how am I supposed to turn this world around
By only waiting for the savior to come back down?

But how are we supposed to draw them to light
With stories about doubts in our lives?
This is enough to make them wonder.
Then a voice filled the air and sang all night:

"You are the ones. I've chosen you.
Now go and do what I've meant you to.
You are the ones. I've set you free.
Now go cover the world in my only peace.
You are the ones. I've cleaned the slate.
So that one day through you I'll save this place."

So night time, let it consume,
For I am no longer afraid
As the sun sets warmly
on this place.

Photo by Heidi Dru Kortman

The Christian Reformed Church is active in missions, education, publishing, media, pastoral care, advocacy, diaconal outreach, and youth ministry. To learn about our work in North America and around the world, visit www.crcna.org.


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