

Inside Look at Amish Women's Stories Reveals Radical Grace of God

Note: This is Part 1 of a two-part series. Watch for Part 2 next week.

Ever wish you could visit with a group of Amish or Mennonite women over a cup of coffee? In the pages of *Homespun*, Amish and Plain Mennonite women swap stories and spin yarns while we listen in. Lorilee Craker, bestselling author of *Money Secrets of the Amish*, collects these personal writings about hospitality, home, grief, joy and walks with God.

The stories include one woman who struggles with feeling inferior to her sister, from another about her longing for a baby and from a third who accidentally bought stretchy material to sew her husband's pants. Each woman's story is a testament to the grace of God and the blessings of community.

Q: What was the inspiration behind your new book, *Homespun*? How did you collect the stories included in the book?

Herald Press approached me about being the general editor of a collection of writings from Amish and Mennonite women. I collected the stories from mainly two sources, *Daughters of Promise* magazine, a beautiful and beautifully written literary journal done by conservative Mennonite women, and *Ladies Journal*, a much more spare periodical by Amish women.

It was thrilling for me to discover new writers and incredible writing from mostly unknown writers. These women have a lot to say, and I was fascinated by their take on modern life. To hear from women specifically appealed to me, as a feminist. Sometimes in conservative subcultures, their voices are silenced or muted. This book gives them space and grace to

Speak.

Q: In what ways were you challenged to rethink your concept of welcome and hospitality?

In our HGTV era, we can begin to believe that hospitality equals a perfectly renovated and decorated space. I love all that stuff, and that's great, but these writers helped me get back to the true meaning of opening your home to others. I had just bought this table set for my patio, but all summer had hosted only one time. Why? Because of the weeds! Meanwhile, I could have blessed my guests all summer. These essays helped me get back to the idea of lengthening the table, not caring as much if things were "perfect."

Q: The advice in the "Abide" section varies from painting your home bright colors to reflect yourself to having plenty of white space. However, decorating tips really aren't the point. How does the section on abide differ from hospitality?

Hospitality is about opening your home to others, while the act of dwelling is different. How do we create a nest that nurtures and shelters us? Bethany Hege's piece called "White Space" is one of the loveliest pieces in the book and one of the most insightful things I have ever read on the topic of home décor and design. "Keep it simple but keep it significant," she writes. Her words really challenged me to do just that. For example, I framed an 8 x 10 print which reads, "Cheap Like Borscht," a saying known to Russian Mennonites and something my dad would always say. Every year, I make sure and buy gladioli because they were my Grandma's favorite flowers. I hung a large photo of a field with flax and canola—the two crops my Grandpa farmed—over my fireplace. To me, I am keeping things simple but significant.

Q: All of the stories in *Homespun* could actually fall under the category of testimony, but how do the stories in that section stand out among the others?

"The Lord is My Rock" profoundly moved me. Ervina Yoder tells about giving birth to her stillborn son. "I go to the grocery store and no one knows I'm a mommy," she writes. Every time I read that, I get chills of sorrow. Yet her faith also gives me chills.

Q: Can you share one of the modern-day miracle stories included in the book?

Danielle Beiler's "When You put Your Money in God's Bank Account" is one of my favorite pieces in the book. It's a very detailed journal, really, of God's provision for her day to day. I love how she never ran out of gas, no matter how low her tank got. It reminds me of manna from heaven, except in this case manna was fuel!

Q: How is the preeminence of family different among the Mennonites and Amish versus those in other communities?

I think the biggest thing is our shared experiences. We are the "peculiar people," an ethnic subculture with no homeland (so people don't think we are an ethnicity) with a shared history of terrible suffering (especially the Russian Mennonites, the most recent wave of immigration from Ukraine who still have family members who remember living in Stalinist Russia). Those shared experiences set us apart and make our families close knit because we understand each other in a way no one else does.

Q: What does it mean to be one of God's beloved? How do the stories reflect that belonging?

These women have a deep, radical faith that spreads so much light. This was the hardest section from which to choose because there were so many moving pieces. "Rebuilding from the Shambles of Shame," for example, is profound. She compares the process of rising up out of shame to restoring a crumbling old house. Often while reading these pieces I felt stirred and uplifted.

Q: What do you ultimately hope readers will gain from reading *Homespun*?

I hope they will find a pocket of peace and gentle witness in their hectic, modern lives. These women have a countercultural, singular mindset that is refreshingly different. I hope our readers will see their own stories in a new, Homespun light! {eo}

*Learn more about **Lorilee Craker** online at [. You can also find her on Facebook \(@LorileeCraker\), Twitter \(@lorileecraker\) and Instagram \(@thebooksellersdaughter\).](#)*