

**Ann Kurtz**

**From Interview at Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community - Summer 2005**

I was born in Greenwood Delaware in the Mennonite community there. The Teneffosses were up there too.

When I was eleven years old, in the fifth grade, I got expelled from school. The public school. So did all the other Mennonite children. The school required the pledge of allegiance to the flag, but we weren't allowed to salute the flag, so they expelled us. I'm not sure which day, but P.T. Yoder was born the day we were expelled.

His older sister and a couple of his brothers were already in school and were expelled too along with the three of us from my family.

The church started the first Mennonite school in Greenwood then, but we were too far away and didn't have transportation so we didn't go to school at all for most of the year. Attendance was compulsory in Delaware so they got behind my dad about us not being in school so he put us in the Mennonite school for the last three days of school and we walked three miles to school and three miles back.

The next year we went back to the public school but I didn't want to go back to the fifth grade so I told them I was in the sixth grade and that's where they sent me. My younger brother who had been in the third grade told them he was in the fourth grade and was put there but my older brother had to repeat the 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

I never failed anything and didn't have too much trouble except history. But I didn't like school anyway and I knew I didn't know this stuff. After Christmas, at mid-terms I was working on history and got a D. First D I ever got in life, only one I got in my life.

My family attended the Greenwood Mennonite Church but never belonged there. It was a plain church, they were still wearing hooks and eyes rather than buttons when I moved down here. They didn't have the barndoor pants anymore, but they still had the hooks and eyes. My parents were from the Alleghany Conference and it wasn't as plain as the Greenwood church.

My dad was very strict about behavior in church. We weren't even allowed to turn our heads. People talked about what good children he had. But hey...better be good or else.

That led my parents and others to form the Tressler Church in Greenwood. We started church in a schoolhouse and I was a charter member of the church. I think there are only two charter members left.

Besides the Mennonite school there was an Amish school in Greenwood too. Alma Moss' brother taught at the Amish school. Alma Maust taught here in Mt Pleasant at the Mennonite school here until her cancer in 1953. She was Carol's first grade teacher.

Miss Alma's mind wasn't good the last year she taught, the cancer I guess, and the children got out of hand and she did some unusual things. Chester Mast blackened his face with a lead pencil and she took some kind of scouring powder and washed it off. The kids wouldn't sit in their seats like they were supposed to and all that sort of stuff.

After her health got so bad she had to quit, Lenora Wenger took over and got things straightened out. She made them toe the mark.

### **Meeting Jim**

Jim, he was from Westover, Maryland, came up to my community in 1935 with some young people to visit our congregation or some folks who had moved down from Westover, I don't remember which.

Anyway, they were having some sort of special meetings at church, I don't remember the speaker, and he was there and that was the first time I saw him. On the back of a pick up truck. I'd heard of him, but never seen

him. We were 17.

We didn't go together right away, I think we were about 19 before that, but we wrote a bit. There wasn't much money so he didn't come up very often. In the meantime, I went to New Holland to work in a sewing factory for three years. I had worked in a shirt factory in Greenwood run by an old Mennonite man but there wasn't much work in Delaware so I went up there to work. Jim came up to New Holland to see me a few times.

Then he moved to Fentress in 1935 when he was 18 to get work because there wasn't hardly any work up this way. He worked at Roy Wenger's dairy for about a year. I'm not sure how he found out about that job but the Slabaugh boys, Timothy and two of his brothers, from up here had gone down and they may have told him. Then he went over to Newport News to work at Colony Farms Dairy. I'm not sure exactly how long he was there, but he got a job at Yoder Dairies in Kempsville and came back to Fentress to work there.

Jim's father died shortly after he came to Mt Pleasant, in 1935 I think, the same year A.D. Wenger died. Amos Wenger asked Jim to sleep at their house to watch over it while they went to Harrisonburg to bring A.D. Wenger's body back. He said he helped carry his body in the house when they brought him home. He was president of Eastern Mennonite College when he died, in Harrisonburg.

### **Coming to Fentress**

I came to Fentress in the last part of 1941 when we got married. He thought he was going to be one of the first 25 boys that had to go to camp as a CO and if he did, we weren't going to get married, but he wasn't called up.

Mt. Pleasant was very conservative back then, couldn't even have radios. But Jim had one in his car. Vernon Miller had one too. This was before Levi Kramer being Bishop, I think they had someone from Harrisonburg as Bishop, but they were very conservative.

Finding a house was a problem. We thought we had the Nash place, beside where Phillip Miller is now. Vernon and Pauline Miller had just moved out of it to their new house next door and Phillip was just a few months old. Then the Nash's came and they were related to whoever owned the house so they got it and Jim had to really scramble to find us a place to live.

Jake Hershberger had built a little house for Fred and Sarah Yoder on Holland Swamp Road in Kempsville (Fred had worked for Jake on the farm the year before he and Sarah got married) and they were moving out after a year there, so Jim got that for us.

We got married in the Mt Pleasant Mennonite Church on Christmas day in 1941. We were the second couple to be married in the church. Francis and Edna Miller were the first, being married there in June of 1941. Before that, everyone got married at somebody's house.

The house wasn't ready right away, so for a week we lived with Red-Faced John and Ida Miller and moved shortly after New Year's 1942. We lived there one year, then moved to a house across from Yoder Dairies where the Highs Ice Cream store was later, now a pizza store I think. I remember Johnny Keffer wanted to board with us, he worked at Yoders then, but we didn't let him. We just didn't want anybody, to keep anybody.

Ivan Miller worked at Yoder's too, except he went to work for Titus Bergey on the farm so he'd be deferred from the draft. His dad, Ira Miller, took his route at the dairy until the war was over and Ivan got it back.

The dairy had an air raid siren on top of it, and we had a telephone. When the authorities called us to announce a black-out we'd push the button to set off the siren to let everyone know they were calling for a black-out and people were supposed to put their lights out, a total black-out. I remember wondering what they would do when we went on vacation.

Times were tight because of the rationing but we raised some hogs to butcher and Phyllis was just a baby and didn't use all her ration coupons and we'd get enough for sugar, coffee, shoes, the necessities. Clayton Bergey would do the butchering for us.

There was never enough gas, but we didn't need much because we lived across from the dairy where Jim worked. But when Mom died at our place and Menno Yoder, who had farm rations for gasoline, gave us gas to take her to Belleville to bury her.

We stayed there until Phyllis was six years old, she was born while we were living there, and we moved to Chester Wenger's house on Mt. Pleasant Rd in Fentress. Chester Wenger's had moved out to be missionaries, so we rented the house there and Phyllis went to the Mennonite school.

I don't think I had as much trouble fitting in at Mt Pleasant as some folks who moved into the community did. I didn't try to change them, I changed myself. I figured if I was going to belong to that church I would do like the church wanted as long as they wanted it that way. I didn't think we should change the church. I wore a covering to church and for a few years I dressed plain, black stockings, a cape. Pauline Miller did too even tho she never dressed plain in Ohio where she was from.

I didn't learn to know many other people at first. Jim never introduced me to people that much and except for Vernons we didn't socialize much. At first everyone looked alike but after awhile I got to know them.

When you walked into church at Mt Pleasant then, you went in the door and you were in. No entry or vestibule. You went in the door and there you were, benches on the men's side, benches on the women's side. You hung your coats on hooks on the back wall behind the back bench. There was a pot-bellied stove on the women's side for heat.