

Living the Word

by Pastor Ken Miller Rieman

The Danger of Positive Thinking

I'm about the last person from whom you'd ever hear a warning about getting too much of a good thing. My



Myrtlewood's Buena Vista IR photo by Kevin Bowman

friends argue about whether I'm a perfectionist or a maximalist. I usually argue for the latter. I really don't need everything to be perfect and I don't take it per-

sonally when it's not, but I do constantly find myself asking whether there wouldn't be some way that we could improve what we're doing or making or partaking in.

To be fair, I'm not always the one to catch myself over-compensating for things that are not quite good enough. I'm thinking that the very idea of 'good

enough' is my kryptonite. It robs me of my super-power, the ability to make just about anything better.

Virtue or vice seems to depend on one's perspective, and the most startling perspective to come my way lately is being bandied about by Barbara Ehrenreich in her latest book, *Bright-sided: How the relentless promotion of positive thinking has undermined America*.

Honestly, the first time I heard it, I found the title troubling. I think positivity is one of my personal attributes. Whether or not you agree, it is something to which I aspire. In fact, I've often thought that negativity was one of our deeper social problems.

In the interest of full disclosure, I must confess to not having read this book, but I have heard her share her thoughts on the subject in two separate public-radio interviews.

Last week, Fred Utter re-introduced me to that 'Magic Eye' thing that was so popular in the nineties. You know the funky carpet-pattern looking photo collage that supposedly contains a 3D image if you can just look at it the right way. Well it actually does occasionally work, but you have to hold the picture close and focus on it close, without bringing your eyes together as you nor-

The New Olympian

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mally do when you're trying to look at one point. In relaxing, and allowing each eye to take in a slightly different image, a third image appears, in three dimensions. Enough said.

Ehrenreich is trying to do a similar thing. In observing several seemingly independent cultural tendencies, she has perceived a single pattern.

After she was diagnosed with Breast Cancer, she was barraged by social pressure to 'stay positive' and visualize her healing. She was reminded that all was not lost and that some had it much worse than her. The unspoken message was clear: "If you don't get better—if you don't lick this thing, it's likely because you don't have the right attitude." At the very time when she needed understanding and support, she was feeling pressured and ashamed.

Many will remember the 'irrational exuberance' with which Wall Street speculated in mortgage based securities. That reasonable minds were disturbed by the growing complexity of bundles and sub-primes didn't make a difference. Plenty of folks were making out like bandits, so who wanted to be left out? The warning signs were there and some were reading them, but most people weren't paying attention. When it all came crashing down we wondered why no one had done anything. Wall Street admitted to poor judgment but maybe it goes deeper than that.

Joel Osteen, and a growing number of mass-market Christian writers and preachers proclaim a 'prosperity Gospel' that is 'good news' to the wealthy. Wealth, they say, is a sign of God's favor and blessing. Wealth is a natural outcome of being good. Even the New Age movement has its share of people saying that if you want good things to come to you, you simply need to put good things out into the universe. These Christians rest easy with the notion of a just God who favors them, and

controls what comes there way. The New-Agers, less often Christian, but no less often well-off are equally drawn to their notion of cosmic Karma. And all of them draw comfort from the widely held cultural bias toward intentions over results. Well, Barbara Ehrenreich isn't going to give them an 'A' for effort.

And that's another area, raising our kids. Leaving the school of hard knocks, newer generations have preferred the carrot to the stick. One outgrowth was an inclination to affirmation. Unfortunately, that often takes the form of a mantra. "You can do anything you want to do. Chase your dreams. The sky's the limit." What parents never intended, but sometimes discover is that their children read between the lines. "If you don't succeed, it's because you didn't try hard enough, or have the right attitude."

Say what you will about Barbara Ehrenreich, she doesn't mince words. And maybe it's time for us to stop too.

People who come to church shouldn't have to paste a smile onto their face when what they're needing is friends with whom they can be real, even when they're discouraged or afraid. Those



Kate Miller and sister Maggie demonstrate their pasted-on smiles.

who are stuck without work shouldn't be afraid of others thinking they're to blame. When the prophets who see problems and raise a warning or point to a better way are told that their attitude doesn't contribute toward a positive workplace or welcoming environ-

ment they tend to stay quiet or leave. Ehrenreich said it well. "I never think delusion is OK." Buddhism likens optimism to a ladder. Every hopeful rung higher that we climb, we are farther from the ground and less stable all the way. Better to peel back the illusions and see the world as it is.

So I'm re-considering positivity. I still think we need it. But we also need to be aware of the danger in it.

The Church of High-Fidelity seeks to be faithful to the Source. That is the world as it has been made. The world as it is, made by the One who always has been and always will be. The Church of High-Fidelity honors the whole range of human emotion as a gift. It believes that each one is capable of revealing Truth. It seeks to comfort the afflicted with a knowledge of our care, but also to afflict the comfortable when they have turned away from those who suffer from their violence, their greed, or even their neglect.

And through it all, there is still good news. Opening our eyes and ears, we will perceive. Opening our minds and hearts, we will understand. Why? Because we have a God who loves us and has surrounded us with a rich diversity of companions, each with their own special and powerful insight into our universe. Thank you, Barbara Ehrenreich, for yours.

February is African American History Month



Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.
- MLK Jr.



Xuny Haley and Amy Helmuth building a cob house at the 2007 Eco-Forestry work camp at Camp Myrtlewood in Oregon.

Church of the Brethren 2010 Workcamps

Registration for 2010 workcamps opened online at 7 p.m. CST on Monday, January 25!

Don't forget: everyone who registers will need their own login to the Church of the Brethren website.

(Go to <http://www.brethren.org/> and click on "Sign Up" at the top of the page.) You can create this ahead of time, so you're ready to go when registration opens.

Go to the registration page Contact us with any questions at cobworkcamps@brethren.org or:

1-800-323-8039 x 286.



Myrtlewood co-manager John Jones teaches Kay Guyer to use a chain saw.



Eduardo Mendonça

Music, Joy and Celebration

Reading: I Chronicles 15.16-24

David also commanded the chiefs of the Levites to appoint their kindred as the singers to play on musical instruments, on harps and lyres and cymbals, to raise loud sounds of joy (I Chron. 15.16)

Meditation from our past: You don't sing? And you can't carry a tune? That's hard to believe because you've been making music from the day you were born. That first cry was a sustained sound, with a tone all its own. Your mother and father heard music in the cooing, gurgling noises you made before you could talk. And there was a beat in your pulse from that first day on. Often you would call for Mom-mie or Dad-dy with an accent on the first syllable and with a high note followed by a low one, or sometimes, in anger, the other way around.

Music began for you when you were able to sustain a sound, form a tone, use your natural sense of rhythm (as regular as a heartbeat) and develop little melodies in cadences that are still a part of your speech. You may even have harmonized with another voice. All the elements are there—even if you can't read a note of music and think your voice is a monotone.

Music in worship is just as natural, just as interwoven with all the various ways in which we express our thanksgiving and praise, make our petitions and prayers, or to reach out to touch other persons in the body of Christ. Music is integral to worship and celebration. It may serve as a means or tool to implement acts of praise, but music is far more than an aid. It is a gift we offer with ourselves when we sense the presence of God.

Kenneth I. Morse

[reprinted from Fresh from the Word]



Kimya Dawson

Artists for HAITI

Benefit Concert and Art Auction held January 24, 2010

In response to the devastating earthquake in Haiti, the church board had thought to hold a bean supper fundraiser. That was until OV neighbor, friend, and musician Chic Street Man and his wife Karen Sorenson offered to help organize a benefit concert. With Pastor Ken, they gathered musical and visual artists willing to donate their talent to the cause.

Sunday night, January 24th gave members of the audience an eclectic and beautiful show. Contributing artists included Cathy Oberg, Secretary Dan Smith-Derksen's sister-in-law Elizabeth C.D. Brown, June Grandison's brother Darryl, David Horsey, and our custodian Percy Dawson's daughter Kimya, whose contributions to the 'Juno' movie soundtrack earned that album a 2009 Grammy.

In all, the event, planned in just 5 days, raised over \$4000.00 for *Church World Service* to use in their efforts to bring emergency aid to the Haitian people.

At least a dozen other folks from our congregation spent many hours in preparations and hosting. Thank you all!



Chic Street Man



David Horsey



Sharing Together in Prayer

- For the people of Haiti, struggling to overcome the devastating earthquake that struck Port au Prince last month.
- Thanks for **Ahna Bisterfeldt**, who is out of the hospital after a bout of pneumonia and asthma.
- For **Geraldine Campbell**, who continues chemotherapy for Leukemia.

Ongoing Prayer Requests:

Lowell Geiver
Jimmy Barnes
Peggy Cochran
Adam Ford
Dan Fredrickson
Maurice Carlson

Bill Case & daughter **Carol Kamada**
 Lew Fortin's nephew, **Michael Rogers**

Sharon Haley's siblings:

Mark, Ruth and Paul Andrews

Gene & Donna Harnden

Nancy Louise Wilkinson

Eunice Jarboe

Ed Enzi

Eileen Birky's mother

Vera Gastfield Wolfe

Elsie Clayton

Gloria Sherwood

Thanks Everyone!

Tim and I are grateful for all the prayers. When we went into the ER with Ahna she was having trouble breathing and it was quite scary. When they admitted us they said she would probably be there for a few days. Thankfully we were heading home in less than 24 hours. I can only figure that was due to the prayers from all of our friends and family! We have been blessed with lots of prayers for Ahna and for us, notes of encouragement on our Facebook pages, and even friends bringing dinner. Thank you to all of our church family for the support.

Aimee & Tim Bisterfeldt



Annual Conference Moderator Shawn Flory Replogle listens to District Brethren and Sistren share stories of transformation in their home churches. Olympic View hosted the group for lunch before the meeting. Thanks Jeanesse, Kate and Christine for your super work on the meal.





John Jones and his best friend Marley

Brethren Men's Retreat

Camp Myrtlewood
Feb. 12th - Feb. 15th 2010
by John Jones

Hey Bros, it's been eighteen years and we have our nineteenth men's retreat coming up! We hope you can make it!

We are usually not too hung up on structure—this year we're going to be even more flexible than usual because Margaret and I are going to be in St. Petersburg, Russia. Meg's sister has invited them to go with her on a cultural tour with a bunch of Swiss school teachers. **So, here's the scoop!!**

Jon Zunkel and Josh Phillips will be running camp and the kitchen but they'll need plenty of volunteer help. They'll appreciate lots of dishwashers and other kitchen volunteers! Leslie Seese and a few other friends have volunteered to help staff the kitchen but you guys pitching in will keep the others from getting over-worked and might even allow for them to have some free time to relax! **Keep the home fires burning!! "Many ants make light verk!"**

As usual, we've got some great stuff lined up and you can add to the program as you like! As always, a schedule of possible



events will be drawn up on Friday Evening after dinner with **Rocci Hildum**. Brother **Barry Joyce** of the Native American Church will again join us and "pour water" for our Traditional Native American Sweat Lodge Ceremony on Saturday at 2:00 PM. Brother



Jim Gomez will show up about 10:00 AM to get the fire set up. Brethren guys who show up early can cover the Sweat Lodge and get the stones ready, etc. **Bill Hainey** is bringing a movie to show as a Saturday afternoon option and Doug Eller will bring leather working crafts again. **Mike Titus** has agreed to organize a bible study for Saturday morning and be the point man for Sunday's worship. **Ed Groff** is going to show up early with the Wise men from the East and he'll have his raspberry jam and waffles. **To get involved with program, phone Doug Eller** at (503) 287-8455 or email him at djeller1@comcast.net.

Bring your stuff—Bibles, Bedding and books and don't forget clean underwear!

The more musical instruments, the better!

Please e-mail us at manager@campmyrtlewood.org **to let us know you're coming** and if you have any special dietary needs, allergies, etc. You can also phone Jon Zunkel at (541) 572-5307—He'll be in charge of registration and collection of your \$50. Let Jon know ahead of time if you need a scholarship. Also, let us know if you plan to stay and eat leftovers on Sunday night!

Preparatory Reading: Marcus Borg's The Heart of Christianity—chapter 6 is especially good and so is the chapter on the Kingdom of God!

Many Blessings to Everyone! Much love, Brother John



Note: Those interested in carpooling down to Myrtlewood should speak with Pastor Ken.