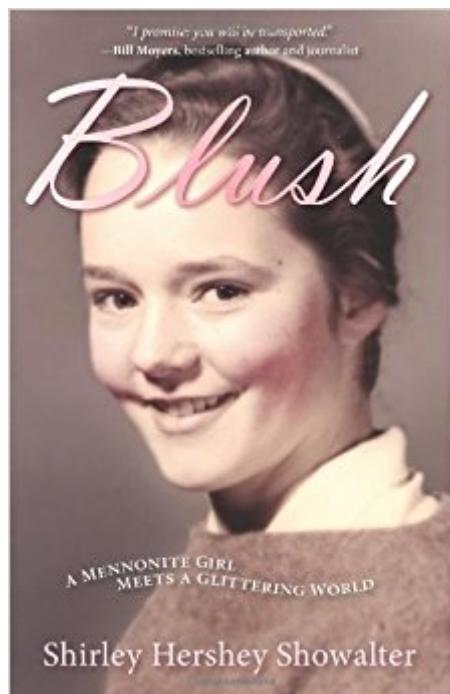


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Blush: A Mennonite Girl Meets A Glittering World



Synopsis

I promise: you will be transported, says Bill Moyers of this memoir. Part Mennonite in a Little Black Dress, part Growing Up Amish, and part Little House on the Prairie, this book evokes a lost time, in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, when a sheltered little girl named after Shirley Temple entered a family and church caught up in the midst of the cultural changes of the 1950's and '60's. With gentle humor and clear-eyed affection the author, who grew up to become a college president, tells the story of her first encounters with the glittering world and her desire for fancy forbidden things she could see but not touch. The reader enters a plain Mennonite Church building, walks through the meadow, makes sweet and sour feasts in the kitchen and watches the little girl grow up. Along the way, five other children enter the family, one baby sister dies, the family moves to the home place. The major decisions, whether to join the church, and whether to leave home and become the first person in her family to attend college, will have the reader rooting for the girl to break a new path. In the tradition of Jill Ker Conway's *The Road to Coorain*, this book details the formation of a future leader who does not yet know she's being prepared to stand up to power and to find her own voice. The book contains many illustrations and resources, including recipes, a map, and an epilogue about why the author is still Mennonite. Topics covered include the death of a child, Pennsylvania Dutch cooking, the role of bishops in the Mennonite church, the paradoxes of plain life (including fancy cars and the practice of growing tobacco). The drama of passing on the family farm and Mennonite romance and courtship, as the author prepares to leave home for college, create the final challenges of the book.

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Customer Reviews

Showalter, now a former college president, was born to a Mennonite family in Lititz, Penn., and much of her memoir takes place in this small town with a Mennonite community at its center. Aside from initial chapters that outline basic information about Showalter's ancestors, this is mainly the story of Showalter's childhood, up to her teenage years. The author-memoirist describes growing up Mennonite; her story affords glimpses into this religion's traditions and rituals. Readers learn how a Mennonite community responds to families in mourning, as when Showalter's sister dies, and how women in Mennonite families pass on culinary heirlooms, i.e., handwritten recipe books.

Unfortunately, Showalter's simplistic writing style limits the scope of some of her observations. The fact that the memoir is written in chronological order makes it read like a diary and deprives it of narrative drive. Filled with platitudes (Everyone's childhood is some mixture of sweet and sour), this memoir will interest readers who want to learn about growing up Mennonite, but it provides more information than insight. (Sept.)

Selected as A Best Spiritual Book Of 2013 --At Spirituality & Practice website

<http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/books/features.php?id=25197> She's a smart, sweetly blushing, baseball-loving, convertible-driving, taking-on-the-bishop kind of girl who delights and inspires. --Dora Dueck, award-winning author Your mouth will water at all the delicious recipes, and some of you will want to return to the other world not only of a culture, but the fifties, the simple, plain lives of ordinary people who weave the soul of a country.--Linda Joy Myers, President, The National Association of Memoir Writers and author

This memoir transports the reader into the world of a girl growing up in a Mennonite family on a farm in Lancaster County, PA in the 1950s. For many it may appear to be a quaint childhood environment far different than their own. But for me it was a reminder of the many ways that my own childhood experiences were similar to those of the author. There are obviously plenty of differences between us, but hardly a chapter went by in this book that I didn't think of similar experiences from my own life. Her chapter titled "Standing Up To The Bishop" reminded me of religious experiences from my younger years that I now view with less than positive enthusiasm. Would survivors of those experiences be the same people today if they had been spared the experience? When I noticed that Shirley had included a Glossary at the end of the book I immediately checked to see if she included one of the most important words of my youth, "worldly." Yes, it was there under "The World." If you think that the word "world" is a synonym for "planet earth," you don't understand the theological

significance of the word. If you want to know the real meaning of the word you'll have to buy the book and see for yourself. Under Acknowledgments I noticed that Shirley included thanks to "... critics of my faith.... . You have been my teachers and mentors, too." It was thoughtful of her to say that. She even included some recipes at the end of the book for those who wish to experience the taste of cooking from the Pennsylvania Dutch branch of the Mennonite Church. (Not all Mennonites come from that ancestry.)

Shirley Hershey Showalter gives the reader a view into the life of a Mennonite farm girl in the 1960s, an intimate look. I have visited Pennsylvania, specifically the Lancaster County area, and I have seen Mennonite and Amish farms, those farm families on the streets of various small towns, and the shopkeepers from whom I purchased items to bring home. But seeing is not the same as living as an Amish or Mennonite and then sharing it on the written page. Thank you, Shirley, for giving me a marvelous trip into Mennonite farm life. The author and I are about the same age so I related on a very personal level with her growing up years and the things happening in the world at that time. What I found most amazing is that, although I grew up a Methodist and the author a Mennonite, our lives were startlingly similar, almost mirror images. The Methodist Church had at that time, based on family values, some rigid ground rules, as the author experienced in the Mennonite church, family and community. On another level, the author and I had similar dreams -- writing, college, moving on, experiencing the world. We both fought similar battles to carry out our dreams. Today, except for a difference in where our professional lives took us, we connect in a parallel world called the Internet in memoir and writing communities. For me, this book took me on a journey of reminiscences of my life, including dreams, frustrations, disappointments and more. Another reviewer, who grew up on a farm, felt similarly in that she could relate so closely with the author's life as a farmer's daughter. I share these words with you not to detract from the review of the book but to show you just how effectively Showalter has written her stories down. They are real, and you can feel the rhythm of each day as she follows her father around the family farm. And Blush is built on a theme of universality, and Showalter accomplishes this beautifully. Showalter's desires to move into the more "glittering world" as a college student and writer were also the dreams of her mother as a girl. The reader senses the author's mother encouraging her with unspoken words. Once again, palpable stories full of description and the members of the author's family. A message of faith runs through Showalter's stories as an undercurrent to the stream of her life with its dreams and yes, its rules. And in the epilogue, it is clear why she chose to stay with the Mennonite Church in the end. My Recommendation: For a memoir that will keep you reading and perhaps, like me and other

reviewers, thinking back over your own life's experiences, Blush is that memoir. Showalter's writing style is fluid, colorful, and honest. Her stories speak to us of life as it really happened, life on the farm but with an insistent pull to the "glittering world." Note: I received a copy of this book from the author via her publisher in exchange for a fair and honest review. I also purchased a copy to donate to my church library.

Beautiful, well-written, recommended! An intriguing, page-turning memoir by Shirley Showalter, a Mennonite girl who kept deep roots in her spiritual community while moving into a worldly life. I love this perspective in Showalter's words: "My first spiritual impressions were formed in nature, and they had no names like Mennonite, Catholic, Hindu, or Jew. I didn't even call them God. On the farm I was surrounded by the sensuality of living things. I learned so much about Mennonite culture, traditions, the dangers of the desire to be big, and a traditional family's flexibility. I learned that conflicts are part of every family, no matter what the spiritual roots, and that love is the strongest glue of all. I leave you with this quote: "There are many ways to arrive at a place, many of them unimaginable at the beginning of the journey."

I absolutely loved this memoir! Now living in Pennsylvania near Lancaster County, and having visited the small Amish and Mennonite towns; basking in the beauty of those farms as we drove along the country roads on many delightful occasions, I found this book unexpectedly and I couldn't put it down once I began to read and became transported to this part of my state, savoring the food, the friendliness, the shops and the "plain" way of life. Shirley Hershey Showalter had dreams and determination and yes, she is related to THE Hersheys of the famous candy town of Hershey, Pa. Tho she writes in detail of her life growing up as a Mennonite and transitioned to becoming an academic, she continues to retain her faith and inspires her students and her readers. I purchased hardcovers of this book and have given it as gifts. A true story of love, truth, inspiration, and an amazing read. Highly recommended for memoir lovers.

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