

The Wonder of BOOKS

By Martha Epler

HAPPY AS THE GRASS WAS GREEN
By Merle Good,
Published by Herald Press, 1971.

Many local people have viewed and appreciated the movie, "Happy as the Grass was Green." In this column, we shall review the book by the same name. The author, Merle Good, is a teacher at Lancaster Mennonite high school. He grew up in a Mennonite home and received his college degree from Eastern Mennonite College in Harrisonburg, Va. Quite obviously, he is well-steeped in the Lancaster County Mennonite tradition.

Merle Good has written a book about just that --- Mennonite traditions and culture. However, quite remarkably, he has been able to take a very objective approach to Lancaster County and its people. In his book, it appears that the author, through his central character's eyes, is an "outsider, looking in!" This is, however, quite desirable and necessary, because Eric (in the book) is just that --- an "outsider."

Because we, in this area, are so familiar and well-acquainted with the plain folk, we wonder how a book about them could have such widespread appeal. We take their unique lifestyle for granted. However, in this day and age such a pattern of living is rare and worth analyzing. Merle Good has analyzed the culture through the astute eyes of Eric, a long-haired youth from a New York university who visits the area with a college friend.

In the novel, Eric decides to spend some time in Lancaster County after he has developed a sort of fascination with the Mennonite way of life. To him, it offers appeal because of its peacefulness and simplicity. He becomes involved in their homes, their work, their religion, and even with one of their beautiful young women! Eric's character is defined well in the book.

This reviewer sees him as a sort of "Holden Caulfield" type. Holden, as many readers may know, is the lost, rebellious youth in "Catcher in the Rye." We see Eric as an extremely sensitive young man with a great desire to find himself. He is quite kind and loving, as well as intelligent. He has a certain "pseudo" worldliness and sophistication, but at heart, we find him appealingly adolescent. Eric is caught between two lifestyles; he is also caught between youth and an illusive maturity.

The descriptions of Mennonite life are vivid and enjoyable. By reading "Happy as the Grass was Green," one enters the home of Eli, a wise and sage Mennonite prophet. The reader attends a simple and moving Mennonite

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that seems relevant to the entire theme. She says, quite simply, "People are people the world around." In the simple wisdom of her statement might be found the answer to Eric's searching.

The problems and situations found in the book are quite realistic. The author does not fantasize or romanticize to the extent of incredibility. The book is solid, true-to-life, and believable. Perhaps this aspect of "Happy" accounts to a great degree for its success.

We wonder if it is humanly possible for any person, any place, at any time to achieve the true bliss of a childhood on a Lancaster county farm where life

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Would you like to write to your state or federal representatives in Harrisburg or Washington? Here are their addresses:

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Sen. Hugh D. Scott, Room S-230, Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515.
Sen. Richard S. Schweiker, Room 6221, Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515.
Rep. Edwin D. Eshleman, 416 Cannon House Office Bldg., Washington, D.C., 20515.

STATE

Senator Clarence Manbeck, Fredericksburg, Pa., 17026, of State Senate, Harrisburg, Pa. 17120.

Representative Kenneth E. Brandt, Bainbridge, Pa., 17502, or State House of Representatives, Harrisburg, Pa., 17120.

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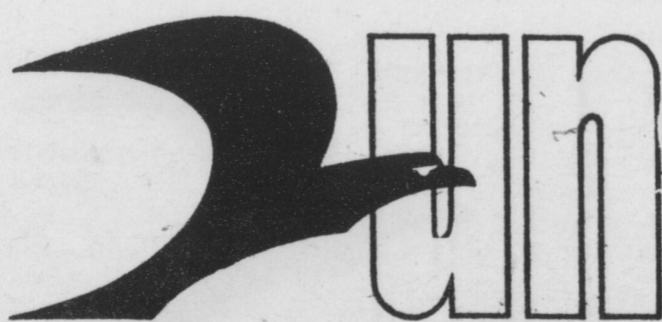
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