

dust between my Toes

An Amish Boy's Journey

Wayne M. Weaver

with illustrations by Wayne Troyer



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This book is dedicated to my grandchildren:

ANDREW WAYNE WEAVER
TRAVIS ROBERT WEAVER
TYLER MATTHEW WEAVER
RACHEL ELIZABETH WEAVER
AARON BENJAMIN WEAVER
DOYLE JAMES WEAVER
GARRETT MONROE LAM
ABIGAIL LOVINA WEAVER

I also dedicate this book to the many Amish children who grew up as I did as well as to the many thousands of rural midwestern children born a generation or two before I was. All of us had the common experience of living without electricity, farming with horses, traveling by buggy and sleigh, and attending one-room schools. I wish all of you happy, nostalgic reminiscing. May my cousin Wayne Troyer's pencil sketches of rural life bring back pleasant memories. For those who continue in the old ways, may you be rewarded with *real living*. Where the old ways are changing, to become no more, I can only feel a little sorry. I trust my family and friends will enjoy reading these reminiscences as much as I enjoyed writing them.

Thanks

The people who helped bring this writing to fruition in a special way are my wife, LaVina Miller Weaver, and my mother, Elizabeth Schlabach Weaver. I also relied on my brothers Roy, Dan, and Monroe Jr. (“Buckwheat”) to verify some of my early childhood recollections. All four of our children; David, Mark, Mary, and Lois contributed to the book.

A special thanks goes to David Wiesenberg for shepherding the entire writing, editing, and publishing process. The book would not have been possible without the counsel and editing help provided by David and Elsie Kline and by Fran Mast. I also wish to thank Dennis Kline and his sister Marie Kline for the final proofreading, and Marvin Wengerd and the Carlisle Printing staff for printing the book. Mona Hershberger (Pifer Jake’s Mona) was very helpful in providing neighborhood information and confirming dates in the early part of the book. Many of the people who have worked on this project are from the Amish community. Their erudition, resourcefulness, and attention to detail are to be much admired.

I am truly indebted for the warmth, feeling, and insight that the pencil sketches contribute to the story. After the artist, Wayne Troyer, read the manuscript we each made a list of places in the story we felt could benefit from a sketch. The items we had in common are the sketches in the book. In every instance, the finished sketches exceeded my expectations. The artist’s childhood had much in common with mine. In addition to growing up in an Amish home, Wayne’s mother, Clara is my first cousin. Clara’s mother, the artist’s grandmother, was my father’s oldest sister Ada. You will meet Ada later, as a young teenager visiting the St. Louis Zoo.

Dust Between My Toes: An Amish Boy's Journey

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Opening Remarks

PSYCHOLOGISTS TELL US THAT WHO WE ARE IS DETERMINED by a combination of factors. They say our gene pool, the teachings of our parents, our upbringing and our environment determine who we are. The environment, they go on to explain, includes our education, what we see and read, and the people with whom we associate. I acknowledge that all of these are important in fashioning us into who we are. However, I believe that our destiny in this life and in the next are determined by our spiritual essence. I believe this, even though my life has all too often failed to embrace the spiritual within me. Having said this, I wish to mention several people, other than my family, whose lives and works have, in a special way, motivated and inspired me.

H. Lester Houff was a model and mentor to me in the formative years of my professional life. Mr. Houff, known to his friends as H.L., was a Virginia farmer and businessman from

northern Augusta County. He grew up and lived in the Weyers Cave area. For many years, in addition to farming, he owned and operated a thrashing rig and a chicken-egg-and-cream route. In the Depression years, his trucking enterprise grew from a cream-and-egg route to include livestock brokering and, eventually, the transport of other commercial goods. With the help of his family, especially his son Cletus, the family business grew over the next several decades into a large trucking firm. Since the death of H.L. and Cletus, the business is being operated by Cletus' sons Dwight and Doug. The home office is located in Weyers Cave, with terminals in many of the larger cities in the middle Atlantic states. My wife and I value our continued relationship with the Houff family.

Mutual friendship probably best describes the relationship with Rudy and Doris Soldan. Other than my immediate family, the Soldans have been my best friends over recent years. They and their son Rick lived just outside Mount Crawford, Virginia, when I first met them in 1975. Rudy had just retired from the United States State Department as a Foreign Service officer. While stationed in Moscow, Rudy was attacked and badly beaten by Russian guards at the United States Embassy. Subsequent to the beating, he had a heart attack. Following his recovery from the heart attack, Rudy was assigned to Manilla in the Philippines. After he returned to the States from Manilla, Rudy retired on a medical disability. After returning to the States, they retired to their Mount Crawford, Virginia home.

Rudy came to the United States from Czechoslovakia at the age of fifteen. His mother, a widow, had immigrated earlier. Rudy's life in the United States started as a baker in New York City. After recovering from injuries he suffered in World War II in the Battle of the Bulge, Rudy was recruited by the United States State Department. He completed the required training

and began his life's career first as a Foreign Service Staff Officer and was later commissioned by the Congress. Rudy speaks seven languages. The Soldans were stationed in various United States embassies all over the world during his career. Some of the stories of their experiences from those years are, to say the least, spellbinding.

My respect and admiration for the generation of doctors prior to my generation has only increased over the years. I have had the opportunity to sit and listen to people like Dr. Luther High and Dr. Owen Patterson talk about the way things were in the '30s, '40s, and '50s. Dr. High told me what it was like to get stuck in the snow, twelve times one winter, between Mount Hope and Bunker Hill, Ohio. Those were the days of one dollar office visits and two dollar house calls. Baby cases, as they were called, cost twenty dollars. Dr. High tells of losing several baby cases one year to a newcomer to the practice of medicine in the county. After the new doctor found out what the going rate for baby cases was, he underbid the other doctors by charging only eighteen dollars. The house calls he made, starting out in an automobile, but often completed in a buggy or sleigh, are too numerous to mention.

My favorite authors are James A. Michener, Allan W. Eckert and Mark Twain. Their writings have, I am sure, over the years influenced my interests in history, geography, and people. Although I have read nearly all of Tom Clancy's books, I sometimes come away with just a tinge of guilt. His writings try my rule to limit my reading to material that is useful and informative in real life. Some of his writings also test a second rule: to not read material that I would be uncomfortable recommending to my friends and family. My favorite newspaper columnist is George F. Will.

At least one biography of many of the prominent public fig-

ures over the last forty years is in my library. A habit I acquired as a young grade-schooler—reading two newspapers a day—has remained with me throughout my adult life. I still consider this the cornerstone of my education.

Numbered among the acquaintances I have who grew up in Amish settings similar to mine are at least six other medical doctors and many nurses. The group also includes two commercial airline pilots and many businessmen and women, as well as other professional people. One of the pilots, Gideon Miller, was recently killed in the TWA flight 800 crash catastrophe. He was a member of the church my wife and I attend when we are in Sarasota, Florida. Another pilot, Myron Stoltzfus, flies for American Airlines. His routes take him to Europe and South America mostly. His family attended Weavertown, the Beachy Amish church we attended during my residency years at Lancaster General Hospital in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

I cherish the many Amish friends I have, who are more learned than I am in various fields, and yet, have no formal education beyond the eighth grade. Education, I believe, is as much about attitude as about formal, didactic material.

Preface

MY PARENTS, MONROE AND ELIZABETH WEAVER, BELONGED to the Old Order Amish faith. At the time of my birth in the summer of 1937 they were living on Grandmother's farm near Mount Hope, Ohio. I was the third child; two brothers, Roy, two, and Dan, one, preceded me. Uncle Isaac has frequently reminded me that he made bicycle trips to Mount Hope two nights in a row the week I was born. The first one, early one evening, was for Frank Shoup the veterinarian. My parents' favorite driving mare, Queen, had problems foaling. The second night's trip was to call Dr. Mitchell to attend my birth.

When I was six months old, my family moved from Grandmother's farm in Holmes County to a small seventeen acre farm in Salt Creek Township, Wayne County. This was my home for the next eleven years and the setting for the first part of this book. The rest of my growing up years took place on the farm we moved to, west of Holmesville, Ohio, in 1949. My father



Grandma's home where I was born,
near Mount Hope, in Holmes County, Ohio

passed away in May, 1993. My mother, at age eighty-three, lives in the *daudy* house on the home place with a granddaughter. One of her grandsons and his family live in the farmhouse.

I am now a *Daudy* (grandfather) to eight grandchildren. The oldest ones are beginning to show an interest in their heritage. The "*Daudy, when you were a little boy*" questions, along with prompting from my children, my wife LaVina, and friends got this manuscript started. These stories of childhood recollections and life experiences are the result. When the initial plans for a forty to fifty page booklet got out of hand, a book ensued. Like most people I know, my life has had its good and bad times. It is hoped the readers of these memoirs see me, for the most part, as a participant on a journey that took some unexpected turns.

Amish children are taught that the pursuit of individual acclaim, including talking and writing about one's self, is unbecoming to those claiming the faith. It appears that I have internalized this tenet sufficiently to have experienced some uneasiness and hesitation before getting started on my memoirs. In many respects, it was reassuring to realize that thirty-five years haven't distanced me from the values taught to me as a child. I shared these misgivings with David Kline, an Amish farmer and writer. He assured me that he was well acquainted with the feeling. He told me that one's attitude and purpose can always be second-guessed.

I hope these memoirs pass the attitude-and-purpose litmus test for its readers.

Childhood and Elementary Years

IT WAS 1943, THE SPRING BEFORE MY SIXTH BIRTHDAY. I FELT quite important waiting for Pifer Katie to come to the door. This was the first time I was sent on an errand to the neighbors. It was planting season and we needed to ask our neighbor, Jacob Hershberger, known as Pifer Jake, if we could borrow a team to till a field for strawberries. We wanted to arrange for the horses before they were turned out to pasture for the day. It was early in the spring and as my feet got cold, I reminded myself that I was already five, and anyone big enough to run an errand like this shouldn't mind cold feet. My two brothers, seven and eight, had to go to school that morning. They walked to school with the other neighbor children as they came by our house.

On this April day, our family included Father, thirty-four years old, Mother, thirty, Roy, eight, Dan, seven, the writer, five, Ada, four, Fannie, three, and Monroe Jr., two. Amanda, an infant, had died two months earlier, at nine months of age.

Mother's sisters, Mary Ann and Amanda, helped so much with the housework and caring for the children, they were considered family too. We all wore traditional Amish clothes made by my mother on a foot treadle sewing machine. About the only clothes we bought were underwear, socks, and headgear. My father's presence gave our home a sense of security. As I remember it, my home was an orderly, disciplined place. That was so without a great deal of effort. I don't recall Father ever being angry or unkind with my mother. My father didn't like slothfulness or the appearance of it. He admonished us to always walk like we were going somewhere, and do our work as if it was worth doing.

I was usually allowed to sleep-in in the morning, at least until my two brothers went to school. This morning was different; there was an errand to do. As my feet got colder, I knocked on Pifer Jake's door again. Just then, I heard Katie coming from the barn where she had been milking. She had a way with children. She assured me that I was pretty big to run such an early morning errand. On this morning she gave me a cookie. The cookie was good, but I was hoping for one of her good half-moon schnitz pies. When she turned to the cupboard instead of the blue pantry door, I knew it would be a cookie that morning. She read my note and after assuring herself that I was warm, she saw me out the lane. A few minutes later, I arrived home with a note for Father clutched in my hand. That summer I was assigned other chores. The first one was to keep a cardboard box behind the kitchen stove filled with corncobs.

Values were primarily taught by example. I do recall that the distinction between "acting honest" and "being honest" was taught by using the biblical example of Ananias and Sapphira in the Book of Acts. As a young child, I was taught a lesson about promises and promise-keeping because of neglect-

ing to do a chore I had agreed to do for my grandmother. Ten cents' worth of kindness and help, I was told, is worth far more than the grandest promises or good intentions.

We lived at a country crossroads, which meant other roads brought children past our house on their way to school. This made for a lot of exciting news when the boys came home from school each day. We found out who had a new calf or colt, new puppies or kittens, or a new brother or sister. The boys were the information exchange for the eight to ten families going by our house to school.

My father operated a feed mill and ran the small dairy and poultry farm we lived on. Pifer Jakes lived a quarter of a mile away, down a lane, off the road going east. Mona Daves lived on the next farm along the east road. Katie, Pifer Jake's wife, was a sister to my grandmother. Mona Dave's wife, Tina, was also Grandmother's sister. Johnson School was about a half mile up the west road at the next crossroads. Jewel Bupp lived in a lane to the north before you got to Johnson School. Just past Bupp's lane along the south side of the road was the Urie Gingerich farm. Mona Gingerich lived on the first farm on the road going north. Just beyond their farm, at the crossroads for US Route 250, was the blacksmith shop. Abe Shetler, the blacksmith, and his family lived next door.

Pifer Mona recently reminded me of the way he, and some of the local farmers, got their horses home from the blacksmith after shoeing. The farmer or his son would leave the horses at the blacksmith shop in the morning. After the horses were shod, Abe started them on the road back to the farm and released them. Some time later, depending on the distance, the horses appeared at their owner's barn door.