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Full to the Brim

*Ach du Schrek!* Fritz is acting  
like he can't breathe in church  
because he thinks the ladies all spray themselves  
with Lysol before they are coming.  
I just hope he doesn't say something  
to them so I can crawl in a hole.

I don't understand him, for months  
he makes us all come to church half an hour  
early so we can greet all the people  
before Sunday school even. And if I am  
really lucky, he is making us walk there.

*Na, Mensch,* the morning is already so long  
I don't want to stand there from 8:30  
and coming home after lunch time with the kids.

He is teaching in the Sunday School  
and talks and talks so no one can even  
get a word in beside. My ears are full  
to the brim from him.

And then he stands there and tells the people  
about those drug addicts he found preaching  
at Union Gospel and how he brings them home for me  
to feed and how he gave them his leather jacket.

Now he is talking of going to seminary in California,  
in Fresno where all the Mennonites go.  
*Na,* that idea is crazy. We are deacons  
and I am the one visiting the sick ones, writing  
cards for birthdays and making burgers for  
barbecue while he just stands and moves his mouth.

Now, I can hear him inviting  
the Neufelds for lunch.  
*Na, ja,* now I can make food for us  
and them and their nine children.

I know I shouldn't even say these things  
I need to bite my teeth together  
because he is a man and is head of the house  
and so I should be quiet  
but now I am the one that can't breathe.

## A Different Story

The churches in the city are all getting together and not just the Mennonites, even the Baptist ones are taking one block at a time to tell people about Jesus so everyone in Vancouver will hear about him at least once.

*Na ja*, I am too scared to go alone so my best friend Gisela from down the street she and me are doing it together. This we have never done before and now with my English that Helga says is terrible bad.

But I am sinning even when I am knocking because I am praying that they won't be at home. But we are doing it not like the Jehovah's Witnesses when they say *Do you believe in paradise?* No, we say, *I am Leni and this is Gisela and we would like to tell you about Jesus.*

Some they slam the doors and most aren't interested and I feel guilty to even admit it but I am glad because I know it all in my heart but to say it out loud and then in English is a different story.

When we have done our four long blocks and crossed off the houses on maps and both so relieved, I say to Gisela, *I rather would bake Zwieback and bring that to my neighbours to let them see Jesus in me because knocking on the door is not my gift.*

## Time I Don't Have

*Na*, who has time for hobbies? Specially cross stitching to count all those tiny squares when my eyes are tired already - forget it. I liked embroidery for awhile but how many pillowcases could a person want? Quilting, that is something that has to be so perfect and sewing I don't do anymore except for Julie who always needs her jeans hemmed.

In the summer time, I am canning crabapples, peaches, beets and sour pickles and cleaning my house, hanging laundry and trying to run around the golf course at least once a day so that Fritz doesn't think I am getting fat.

When I am not at work, I am baking buns dragging it all to the neighbours, widows and the sick ones. The evenings are full of prayer meetings, singing practice and church. And when I am ready for bed, I sit and am in my Bible and if I am not asleep from that, I read those nice Christian books from the library at church. No, time I don't have for hobbies.

## Encouraging Words

Everyday I go to work I am very friendly with the residents because they are sitting there so bored and lonely and wonder how many more games of Bingo they will have to play before they can die.

And those poor families so frustrated that they have come to visit grandma who lies in her bed and wonders who the strangers are in her room. Then I go in and ask *Na? What's in your sleeves today?* and make them laugh to forget how sad it all is.

The staff all know that I come a half hour early at least so I can load the washing, start the dryers and then I check the kitchen to see if they need help scrubbing oatmeal out of pots and at 7 a.m. I start driving in and out of the rooms with my mop and shake the brush around in the toilets.

*Ach*, but you have to be very careful because there is always somebody that isn't happy. They complained that I was working too hard. That union is a very stupid thing because I just want to work and help everywhere that I can.

But when a resident is dying who cares about that? I drop my broom and hurry to hold the dying hands and pray for them that it will go quickly and that in the end they will see Jesus in heaven.

And you can be sure, that once they are dead I am the one who gets asked to clean the room because I am very thoroughly and in a few hours a fresh one slips in that bed and Pinegrove doesn't lose any money.

Now, when I see somebody new starting working I make sure that I encourage them every day and tell them that they are doing such a good job. I had such a hard time when I started and I don't want that anyone should have to go through that.

I am learning that everyone in this world wants to be encouraged because hearing encouraging words is more important than all the teeth in China.

## One Big Mistake

I think it was one big mistake  
our Heavenly Father made  
that with the sex.

When I think back on my wedding  
night, I am still so ashamed  
I took one look and said,  
*Na, are you sure all of that has to go in there?*

*Na ja*, they say if men don't  
do it, they go almost crazy  
and so I try very hard not to yawn  
when I have to do that.

Then Mrs. Nickel is always angry  
at her husband who is doing nothing  
that *Mensch* can hardly talk  
but wants her in bed all the time.

And Poor Erika, she says she has her hands  
in *Zwieback* dough and her husband  
comes home for lunch and wants that  
and so she has to go and wash her hands.

Men even when they are very old  
want sex until they can't even  
bite into the yogurt anymore.  
In the middle of the day at Pinegrove,  
the care-aids have to go and get Mr. Schmidt  
from Mrs. Penners room, he already  
with his pants down and she  
can't even use a spoon.

I heard a sermon once and the preacher  
said men are like light bulbs  
and we women we are like pot crocks.  
God made so many wonderful things  
but this is really a problem.

## Where I Am

Today, my friend Erika came and found me  
wiping down the toilet in the resident's room  
and told me that I had put dirty laundry  
in the dryer. I don't know why she says that  
is the second time I have done it.

I push the mop out of the room and suddenly  
I don't know which one I have already cleaned  
so I am walking up and down the hallways  
my head going in and out of each room but each one  
looks like the one before and I still don't know.

Erika sees me running along the halls  
and I ask her to help me and she tells me  
I am overworked and that I shouldn't worry  
about it, but that makes me even more mixed up.

She asks me if I am going to eat lunch  
with her like I always do, but I don't know  
if I brought a lunch, I'm not even hungry  
and why would I sit down to eat with her?

Lately, I can't wait to get home because there I will  
have maybe half a banana for dinner because  
Fritz will have already eaten. Then I will  
just brush my teeth and get into my bed  
by six o'clock and read my Bible because there  
I always know where I am.

## All Dressed Up

My girls just came from shopping,  
Karen is showing me a very nice dress  
to wear for my funeral. It is a black one  
with so many folds all the way down.  
She is wondering if I think heaven will be boring,  
*Na, I tell her, if that is boring  
then I will jump right back out.*

At that they are laughing so much  
and ask if I would like my pajamash  
to wear to heaven because I don't like to be cold.  
But that I think is a little bit too simple  
even if nobody is going to see me  
with my eyes closed in the coffin.

I am going in my nice warm black pants  
and a very new pink sweater. It is almost a sin  
to bury a new sweater but Julie has it all  
folded and sitting on the dining room table  
even with a pink bra as if Jesus wants to see that.  
Julie thinks my shiny black shoes look good  
with that but I don't think I will need them.

Julie has already a black dress to wear  
so now we just have to wait for me  
and we can all get dressed up together.



## Hildi's Visit

I see Hildi's face at the door  
my best friend from Brazil since nine years old  
has come to visit me before I go  
but I see Fritz take her away  
to the kitchen while I lie here alone.

He thinks I can't hear him,  
but when nothing else in your body  
is working, then your ears  
can hear more than they think.

He tells her not to talk of dying  
when that is what I am doing  
and that she shouldn't cry with me.  
*Na Mensch*, that guy is crazy.

She comes into the living room  
and my lips smile a little  
like they used to when we were small.  
She gets into my bed and holds me  
and we both cry so hard our throats are hurting.

She runs her fingers through my hair  
tells me again the story of how the choir director  
once said, *We'll stop now until the girls are finished talking!*  
She reminds me that we once said we would  
never get married, that we would always  
be together. And how we shared a chocolate bar  
the night before she married Henry.

I shake my head when she asks of pain  
no one needs to hear about that  
and Fritz comes to take her away  
says I'm tired and need rest  
even though that's what I do all day  
and all night. I can only whisper now,  
*I love you Hildi, in heaven*  
*I will see you*  
*again.*