

welcoming of personal responsibility for his decisions and actions. Growing up in 1975 in a fluorspar mining town on the Newfoundland coast, fourteen-year-old Ron faces difficulties within his family, at school, in romance, and, tying all of his problems together, at the local mine, where there is an intense labour dispute. A more vivid depiction of a young man's sense of insecurity — this side of World War I — is hard to imagine.

At the beginning, it is mostly because Ron is the narrator that readers will probably sympathize with him. Dorion portrays him as being mean to his young brother, hostile towards his dying father, a smart aleck "just getting by" in school, and generally selfish. Besides setting a formidable challenge for the writer, to present such a tough-to-like character as the novel's protagonist actually intensifies the reader's appreciation of one of Ron's major insights: how difficult it is to produce positive change. *Whose Side are You On?* is no Disneyesque tale of miraculous transformation; still, significant changes in Ron's outlook do occur as he grows up.

Many readers will be able to enter imaginatively into the situations which are catalysts for Ron's more mature perspective. Through a class project on the history of their town's labour relations, for instance, Ron gains a less black-and-white understanding of the bitter manager/worker split — the reference in the book's title — which defines many of the townspeople's social interactions. His partner on the project is Jackie, a young woman who reaches out to Ron, placing confidence in him, which in turn actually does give him confidence. Jackie's grandfather, who, like Ron's father, is dying of silicosis from his work as a miner, tells the young researchers about the mine's history; in so doing, he contributes a human, highly emotional dimension to what had seemed to Ron a lifeless topic. In the descriptions of Jackie's and Ron's relationship there are hints of romantic attraction, but this feature is secondary to their sharing of respect and sympathy for Jackie's grandfather, and their sense of how it is vitally important for them to present their project to their classmates. Readers will appreciate, I think, Dorion's wisdom in showing two young people building a connection rather than relying on love to make everything right, or some such cliché.

Similarly, to viewers of the excellent film on much the same subject, *Margaret's Museum*, readers will be led to feel the loyalties and pride of a group of exploited people, as well as the temptation to get out, which they face, even though in many ways they have nowhere to go. Dorion skilfully plays off the developments of adolescence with the novel's larger setting, creating deeply felt insights for readers of *Whose Side are You On?*.

Thomas M.F. Gerry is a professor of English (Canadian Literature) at Laurentian University. He is the author of Canadian and U.S. Women of Letters (1993).

Widening Spirals: A Mennonite Girl Grows Up

Willow Creek Summer. Kathleen Wiebe. Ed. Barbara Sapergia. Coteau, 2000. 200 pp. \$8.95 paper. ISBN 1-55050-169-0. Ages 12 and up.

Because this novel is so deftly written, its multi-levelled complexity is not necessar-

ily obvious. Even more praiseworthy is the fact that *Willow Creek Summer's* intricacies would not cause confusion for readers of the intended ages; rather, they generate the novel's depths of interest and human resonance.

The novel's narrator and central character is fifteen-year-old Tina Wiens. Tina often goes to a special spot called Willow Creek, near her home in the Niagara fruit belt, "to think about stuff." During the spring/summer that is the time span of this novel, Tina has plenty to ponder. For starters, her eighteen-year-old sister is unmarried and pregnant. This pregnancy offends her father particularly and also the rigid mores of the Mennonite community of which the family is part. Although her sister's pregnancy gives Tina some cachet with the popular girls at school, their interest in her is short-lived. For Tina, her sister's state — and, more particularly, various people's reactions to it — parallels her own adolescent struggle for identity. These reactions and Tina's reflections on them help her to understand and articulate her own values. On this level, Mary Anne's pregnancy is a catalyst, forcing Tina to choose and emulate the loving, compassionate, and joyful behaviour of some members of her family and community, and to reject the rigid, gossipy, and hurtful conduct of others. My description here might suggest that the characters who interact with Tina are stock or even wooden; this novel is much stronger than that. Tina is not the only one who matures as *Willow Creek Summer* develops.

Tina's coming to terms with her identity, then, is portrayed through the novel's widening spirals of self, family, and community. Also, Tina's attempts to gain a new equilibrium as a young adult after her juvenile stability has been shaken are made evident through a wide range of conceptual oppositions which Tina faces. These include salvation/damnation, rich/poor, smart/stupid, hypocrisy/truth, mystery/knowledge, suffering/ease, and so on. Tina's thinking and talking about situations where such contraries are manifest dramatizes her attempts to rebalance her life as a young woman in the light of much new learning.

Further rounding Tina's character are several evocative images that run throughout *Willow Creek Summer*. The Mennonites' Low German vocabulary intermingles with English, paralleling these people's status in the larger community. They can say things, tell stories, and create moods with Low German that are unavailable in English. Tina is drawn to her heritage and must accept her distinctiveness at a time when, as a teenager, she is greatly concerned with belonging to the majority. However, no image receives more attention in this novel than food. Tina loves eating, and she vividly describes the dozens of traditional Mennonite dishes that she claims are her "favourite." Foremost are zwieback, homemade buns that are white and doughy in the middle, with a brown outside. Eating them on their own or with cream or butter or jam almost always brings about a feeling of well-being. It doesn't take the reader long to realize that the expression "a bun in the oven" is poetically amplified by the novel's author in order to allow readers to share Tina's experiences and perceptions, not only her thoughts.

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