

THE
MITING
READER'S
GUIDE

DEE YODER

DEE'S STORY

In the summer of 2009, Joe Keim and the Mission to Amish People (MAP) ministry were brought into my family's life through a Bible study. As time went on, the Bible study moved to our home with Joe Keim as the leader of the study.

My family began to work with MAP through volunteer events. Once I heard the stories of the former Amish, I felt a growing desire to share their journey with others. To that point, I had been an avid Amish fiction reader, but once I learned the challenges of being Amish, I realized there was much more than was visible on the surface of this special group of people.

I could sense God tugging on my heart to write about the former Amish journey, but I resisted. I wasn't sure I was up to the task—I wanted so very much to get their stories down accurately and with heart. I didn't want to add to the troubles the former Amish often experience when they simply and honestly relate their struggles: rejection of their truth.

But I began to write. I also took over gathering news and articles for a newsletter that connects the former Amish.

Being a part of the Mission to Amish People ministry has opened my eyes and my heart to the former Amish, and also led our family to a great gift: an "adopted" former Amish daughter and son-in-law!

I believe Mission to Amish People is a calling. It's not always popular to be truth tellers, but it is healing when God brings a soul into His fold. There is grace and acceptance, a removal of fear and the understanding

that heaven is a place a person can *know* they are headed to when their earthly journey is over. Nothing seems more important than being able to share in that good news. Being a part of the MAP ministry has changed our lives.

For more information on Mission to Amish People please visit www.mapministry.org.

THE AMISH IN POPULAR CULTURE

The Miting is a novel about Old Order Amish, but are the Old Order Amish different than the Amish of popular culture? Not necessarily.

The Old Order churches in Holmes County, Ohio, tend to have more interaction with the English (the non-Amish). They tend to work in jobs that bring them into direct daily contact with tourists. Because of this daily interaction, their bishops and members may be more accepting of modern trends, and allow more instances of modern conveniences.

The Old Order and Swartzentruber churches in Ashland County, where *The Miting* is set, have chosen to break away from the Holmes County influences to create a more demanding *Ordnung**. But there are common threads among all Amish church groups: Living life as a community, with as little individual “rights” as possible, is highly encouraged, and good works are extremely important to their Christian ideal. Below are common perceptions from English about the Amish, and how the strict Old Order and Swartzentruber Amish relate.

Popular Perception

Old Order/Swartzentruber in Ashland County

Amish forgive everyone

Forgiveness is not easily extended to those who leave the Amish. Youth are told if they are born Amish, they must stay Amish until death in the hope of going to heaven.

* See glossary page 15

Amish are all Christians	Several former Amish have told me their strict churches are not teaching grace through Christ alone. Most read from a Martin Luther German Bible, but their first and second languages are PA-Dutch (a derivative of German) and English. This means they often do not understand the Bibles they read. Because of this, tradition (or forefather's ways) becomes the most important ingredient to living Amish.
Amish are well educated	Many among the stricter groups receive only an 8th grade education with little to no science, history, or social studies lessons.
Amish are healthier	Some in the stricter groups have little access to dental care, general medical care, or knowledge about modern medicine.
Amish are happy	Fear of breaking the <i>Ordnung</i> or doing something that will keep one out of heaven is strong among the stricter communities.
Amish have simple lives	Following a detailed <i>Ordnung</i> , doing everything without modern aid, and worrying over community concerns makes the strict Amish life complicated.

MORE ABOUT THE SETTING OF *The Miting*

The action in *The Miting* takes place on the northern line between Ashland and Richland counties in northeastern Ohio. The geographical area features rolling hills and wooded stretches of land surrounding farm fields. It is rural, with towns and cities connected by mostly two-lane state highways. The main nearby towns are Ashland (in the book, Ashfield) and Mansfield (in the book, Richland). The Raysburg General Store is called The Olivesburg General store in real life. It is situated at a tiny junction, just inside the Ashland county border.

The Olivesburg General store has been in the community since 1840. The Amish community surrounds the store and it has been a hub for Amish adults, teens, and children for years. As a child, I lived with my family about a mile from the store. Our neighbors were Amish and the farm we were renting was later sold to an Amish family. The same barbershop that my then two-year-old brother had his first haircut in back in 1962 is still attached to The Olivesburg General store. It has changed very little.

Ashland County is about fifty miles northwest from the world's largest Amish communities in Holmes County, Ohio. Amish tourism is not encouraged by the Old Order groups in the area, but services and Amish-made goods are sold to the English at individual Amish farms.

The history of the Old Order and Swartzentruber Amish in Ashland County is much more recent than I anticipated. Since I grew up around the Amish, and even lived in the area in which *The Miting* takes place,

I assumed the Amish had moved into Ashland County well before the 1950s. What I learned from my former Amish friends corroborates what an older person told me several years ago: when she grew up in Ashland in the 1930s and 1940s, there were no Amish.

The Old Order Amish in Ashland County, Ohio, are generally stricter than the Old Order of Holmes County, Ohio. The homesteads, though more decorative than the Swartzentruber groups, are plainer than their Holmes County cousins. Though some Ashland Old Order businesses serve the English, they do not encourage a tourist trade. Instead, they offer goods or services by way of home lettered signs at the end of lanes and driveways. The norm for the Old Order in this area is to maintain a distance from the English, as much as is practical, yet still keep a friendly manner to neighbors.

The Old Order groups in Ashland County, Ohio, left the Old Order Amish in Holmes County specifically so that they could build a firmer *Ordnung* for their people to follow. There are pockets of strict Old Order and Swartzentruber churches in Holmes County, too, but they are much less visible, by choice, to outside people seeking to know the Amish way of living. This is true of the Ashland County Amish groups, also.

TRUE STORIES THAT INSPIRED *The Miting*

In the book dedication, three young ladies are mentioned by first names. Their stories and personalities make up the central character of Leah Raber, but I also was inspired by several other former Amish young people who have shared their experiences over the years.

What I learned from my former Amish friends is that many young people leave the most strict Amish churches and communities more than once before they finally break away for good. The ties to community and family are very strong, as is the admonition, taught from birth, that being born Amish means dying Amish—especially if a person wants to gain heaven. Several of the young people we know have had to pray about how God fits into their new lives. Many accept the grace of Christ quickly, while others need more time to process this wonderful gift. Their spiritual journeys inspire me to examine my own walk with God. Their fresh point of view challenges me to refresh my spiritual eyes and ask for a daily plan from my heavenly Father, too.

Some of the former Amish I encountered were struggling to handle the sudden freedoms they experienced once they left their communities. Their challenges to learn a new way of life moved me. Their hard work, dedication to their former Amish community and the desire to move ahead with their lives, in spite of often having no family support, widened my desire to be more informed. I wanted to learn more about being Amish as well as what it is like to walk away from an Amish heritage.

Finally, volunteering with the Mission to Amish People ministry has

brought an unexpected blessing to our family with the addition of our former Amish “adopted” daughter. Her sweet nature has added a special element to all of our lives. She was not born into our family by natural means, but God has placed her and her husband in our family as the daughter and son-in-law of our hearts.

During our time working with Mission to Amish People, we have met and gotten to know many former Amish, some through the Bible study that was held at our home and others through gatherings, frolics, and life events. Here are a few of the accounts that inspired me.

Bible burning: Young men have related their accounts of having their English Bibles burned. After they reported being “born again,” the Amish parents blamed their conversion on the “strange readings” that must be in the English Bibles. Other young people have reported having their English Bibles taken away.

“Amish” mental hospitals: Reports of Amish young people coerced or forced into Amish mental hospitals have come to our attention through the years.

Amish children can be placed in special facilities that are for those with mental disorders. From the reports we have heard, some of these children are taken there because of their refusal to obey parents or because they have left their Amish communities. This is done with the hope the children will return to the Amish or mend their rebellious behavior after treatment.

The light in the window: I first learned about the “light in the window” during a discussion concerning bed courtship. (Here is a link to my blog post about bed courtship: <http://www.deeyoder.com/2012/03/amish-and-bed-courtship.html>.) This practice is rare, but involves parents allowing an Amish young lady to place a light in her window to let young men know she is available for courtship.

Unofficial shunning: Amish young people are usually not shunned at home if they have not yet joined the church when they leave the

Amish, but in reality, those from the most restrictive Amish churches *are* shunned, just not “officially” from the church. Some of my former Amish friends have reported repeated visits from the bishops and lay preachers, even at their English homes, to pressure them to return. Many receive letters from parents, family members, friends, and church authorities strongly encouraging them to return.

Not being allowed to visit home is a common practice to try to shake the wayward young person into coming to his or her senses and returning to the Amish fold. Because of this, feelings of being “left out,” frustration, and anger toward their families are emotions many former Amish must grapple with while out of their Amish communities.

Being a witness to these events has shown me that this kind of rejection never loses its sting.

Sexual and physical abuse: Sexual abuse and physical abuse have been reported by some leaving the Amish, making counseling for these abuses an important component of Mission to Amish People ministry.

Church members moving into a house to keep an Amish person from leaving: Though this particular action is not common, it is sometimes used to keep a person from going astray, especially if the person has a history of leaving the Amish. Other forms of church participation to try to dissuade folks from leaving the Amish church may also be practiced among the stricter groups of Amish.

GLOSSARY

abroth: counselling session between bishop, lay ministers, and the bride and groom during an Amish wedding ceremony

Ausbund: Amish church hymnal

Bobli: baby

Bott boi: pot pie

Bruder: brother

Bubbli soup: a bean, browned butter, milk, and bread soup

Buve: young Amish men or teen boys

Daet: father

Dadihaus: a smaller home built by families especially for the grandparents. The *dadihaus* is sometimes attached to the main house on a farm. Usually when the older son or daughter begins to manage the family farm, the younger family moves into the main house and the grandparents move into the dadihaus.

Danke: thank you

Die Breef: letter; usually a superstitious letter purported to have protective powers when carried on the person

Dumbkopf: dumb or stupid

Dumme kuh: dumb cow

Eck: Two tables pushed together to form a corner where the bride and groom sit during their wedding dinner.

Eck sachs: gifts placed on the *eck table* for the bride and groom at an Amish wedding

Ecktenders: young people who serve the bride and groom at an Amish wedding

Gott: God

Gut: good

Hohna: rooster

Hosler: male helpers chosen by the bride and groom to help at weddings. *Hoslers* help with horses and buggies for guests and other chores to prepare the wedding and to clean up after the wedding. Could be compared to groomsmen.

Jah: yes

Jungen: young people

Kapp: head covering

Lobleid: hymn of praise, usually sung in every Amish service

Maed: young lady or girl

Maem: mother

Miting: form of “meidning”; shunning or banning a church member from direct contact with other church members. Used to punish the rebellious member in hopes he/she will repent.

Morgen: shortened form of *gut morgen* translated to “good morning”

Nahsich: nosey

Navohugga: female helpers chosen by the bride and groom to help at weddings. Helps to prepare food, decorate, and set up the *eck* table. Could be compared to bridesmaids

Ordnung: A letter or document written by each bishop and church which tells the local church what rules must be followed. This includes how to dress, what colors are acceptable, no cars, no electricity, and any other rules a bishop deems necessary for his church group to live a holy and acceptable life as an Amish person.

Pennsylvania Dutch: An oral dialect of German the Amish learn from birth. Pennsylvania Dutch is not a written language, therefore many spellings of each word exists. “Dutch” is a form of the German name for the German language—*Deutsch*. Often Amish folk will refer to speaking “Dutch,” or “PA-Dutch,” rather than using the long form of the word “Pennsylvania Dutch.” When children go to school around age five, they begin to learn English; therefore, English is their second language. The Bible is written in High (*Hoch* or formal) German, which is a language most Amish have difficulty fully understanding. For this reason, some Amish have difficulty understanding Scripture.

Pfeffernusse: peppery cookie

Rumspringen: Translates from Pennsylvania Dutch to “running around.” This is a time when Amish churches allow their teens to go to Sunday night singings. They will be permitted to spend more time socializing in hopes a future mate will be discovered. Many English think it is an accepted time for Amish teens to “sow their wild oats” the way English teens may, but the Amish would prefer their children do not emulate English teens. Amish in highly touristy areas may ignore English behavior from their teens, but do not encourage it. In most Old Order and Swartzentruber sects, *rumspringen* with English ways is not encouraged at all.

Schtope: stop

Schwester: sister

Schwetz: talk

Shenna bee: beautiful legs

Sputz: make fun of

Suppah: supper

Tag: shortened form of *guten tag* translated to “good day”

Verboten: forbidden

Verstehen mir: Understand me

Wie bisht du: How are you?

Wie gehts: How is it going with you?