

Summer 2004

The **BRIDGE**

Newsletter of the Bridgefolk Movement

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A Bridgefolk Story

George and Abbey Dupuy

**Two young Christians
from other traditions
“pitch their tent” on the
Mennonite-Catholic Bridge**



George and Abbey Dupuy both grew up in Virginia, she a Baptist, he a Presbyterian. They met in the marching band at James Madison Univ. in Harrisonburg, VA. They both completed their education at Eastern Mennonite Univ. in Harrisonburg. They were married in December 2001. George is now a Mennonite pastor. Abbey is now a Roman Catholic.

George credits Eastern Mennonite Seminary for his change. “Attending classes at EMS was a life-changing experience,” he says. “My experience with the Mennonites I met at Seminary was my first real experience of a faith community. I was in seminary on Sept. 11, 2001, and my experience during that time confirmed my need to be in a believers’ community committed to peace and justice.”

“My professors and my friends in the Spiritual Formation department were especially influential. My studies of St. Teresa, Francis de Sales, Meister Eckhart and others were what brought me onto ‘the bridge’.”

“I was invited to attend Big Spring Mennonite in Luray, and soon after offered a job there as Associate Pastor. I was rebaptized and licensed as pastor on the same day, a cold day in November in the Shenandoah River.”

Abbey traces her change to a serious two-year illness that began in her last year of college. “I began RCIA classes intending just to learn more about the tradition, but the journey through RCIA was life-changing and made me realize that I had finally found my home. George and I were married in December of 2001, and I was received into the Catholic Church the following Easter.”

“I had been interested in other traditions, especially Catholicism, since middle school, when I used to try to convert

my Catholic friends at lunch. My roommate in college was a very committed Catholic, and she made a big impression on me. She managed to live her faith every day without seeming overcome by guilt or the need to proselytize. My sponsor during RCIA, Elizabeth, was also very influential—she has a strong faith that is obvious in everything she does.

“The most important influence, though, was St. Therese of Lisieux. When I read *Story of a Soul*, I felt I had met a new kindred spirit. I loved the way she wrote about Jesus and how intimately she knew him. I had always imagined Jesus and myself as being close friends, and I often experienced God’s communication with me through images. Finding out that there was someone else—a Doctor of the Church!—who had a similar approach made me feel I needed to be a part of the tradition that valued her way of thinking.”

What did people think when George and Abbey announced they were going to embark on life together as a Mennonite pastor and a Catholic? George says, “We have certainly struggled with the Spirit’s leading, but eventually we decided that we had to be true to God’s calling. We were certain that we were called to be together, and we were certain that we were being called to our own paths in Christianity. We trusted that God would help us work out the details.”

Abbey says, “Most people seemed to think it was a bad idea, but we both knew we were on the paths God had intended for us. We both felt we had come home to our respective traditions and that we were being obedient. We knew, also, that we were called to be together, so we had to accept that the ‘mixed marriage’ was just part of the bag. It didn’t hurt that we were drawn to each other’s chosen traditions, as well. We just covenanted to

They are now both active in ministry. George is a pastor at Big Spring Mennonite Church in Luray, VA, and director of Faith in Action of Page County, an ecumenical volunteer project that provides services for homebound seniors. Abbey is director of a before and after-school care program for children in grades K-7 conducted by their Mennonite church. They are in the process of becoming foster parents for a boy they met through the after-school program.

They learned about Bridgefolk in the winter of 2003 from Brenda Bellamy, while attending the annual Worship Weekend at Laurelville Mennonite Church Center, and they attended the Bridgefolk conference last summer. "It's so comforting to know that we're not freaks," says Abbey, "that we aren't the only people dealing with these issues." George says, "It was a tremendous feeling to be surrounded by others that were in similar situations. The confirmation of community was wonderful."

But they are also struggling with the problems of being a family while living on the bridge. "Every weekend when I get up and leave George kneeling in the pew on Saturdays—knowing that one of the strongest and most compassionate Christian people I know is not allowed to receive Eucharist in my church—what do we do?" asks Abbey.

"Or when my faith community in the Mennonite church—which is very small and much more closely connected to my personal life than my large Catholic parish—stands in a circle to receive communion, turning to each other and saying, 'The body of Christ,' and I feel almost nauseated because it somehow doesn't feel right to me?"

"Those are the real issues about Eucharist, and it has very little to do with ecumenical councils and dialogues between people who have the power to make important decisions. It's gritty and messy and much more painful than that."

But despite these problems George and Abbey are committed to continuing. "I can't imagine either of us giving up our chosen traditions," says Abbey. "Since this is the way we have been made, and since we're also made to be together, I guess we'll be dealing with a slightly more complicated church life than many other people we know for a long time to come."

She says this realizing the problems of raising children in a Mennonite Catholic family. Abbey asks, "Is it possible to raise children on the bridge? Has anyone ever successfully done this?"

How do they feel about the future? Abbey says, "I think, for now, we've found a community in Bridgefolk that can sustain us in spite of the current divisions between our traditions, and that gives me hope."

George says, "While the bridge can be a difficult place to pitch a tent, I feel sure that this is where God is calling us to be. I believe that we'll stay there."

Nathan Drexel Brubaker

Sarah and Phil Brubaker are the proud parents of Nathan Drexel, born May 15. He was named at a prayer service three days later, and given the names of the prophet Nathan who called King David to repentance at great risk to himself, and Saint Katherine Marie Drexel who was born to an Anabaptist mother and a Catholic father and who used the fortune she inherited to found a religious community dedicated to providing a fair education for African Americans and Native Americans.

Sarah and Phil attended last year's Bridgefolk conference, shortly after being married. They met while students at Duke Divinity School. Phil says, "My liturgically-minded Anabaptism and her justice-minded Catholicism blend well, and we enjoy attending each of our churches together each week. We hope that our marriage will embody the prayer of Jesus in John 17:21 that the Church will be one."

Sarah is a doctoral student in systematic theology at Notre Dame. Her primary interest is theological anthropology, the study of the human person from a theological perspective.

Phil is training coordinator for the Damascus Road Anti-Racism Process, and an administrator for the Center for Peace and Nonviolence, a local coalition of churches in South Bend witnessing together to peace and nonviolence.

Nathan Drexel arrived at 9:33 pm on May 15, 2004, weighing 7 pounds and 11 ounces, and measuring 20.5 inches.



For more pictures of Nathan, and more information about Phil and Sarah, check their website, www.nd.edu/~smorice/