

**OUTSIDE EDEN: Essays  
of Encouragement  
by Peter Short Toronto:  
Observer Publications Inc.  
2006. 96 pages.**

During the years Peter Short served as Moderator of The United Church of Canada (2003-2006) I received with gratitude his carefully prepared communications. Each one caused me to celebrate the power of language well-used. Each one gifted its readers with insights animated by creative, clear and beautiful words. The same can be said for the essays found in his book *Outside Eden*. In the pages of this brief volume readers will be engaged by delightful language which is at once familiar and unusual. "God has taken the plunge. And the taking of it has riddled the earth with heaven." (p 40)

But there is much more than language here! Indeed, its creativity and accessibility present to the reader an invitation to enter a thoughtful conversation with the author. In this may be discovered perspective and encouragement. This book is for the dreamer who is capable of mature wonder. That is, it is for all of us "paradise-haunted" creatures who "still have the capacity to generate...dreams. Dreams get into your soul in spite of yourself and in spite of all the

evidence. Dreams point to the wild presence of hope, one of the great gifts of the Spirit." (p 5-6)

The author's reflections on life lived in the faith invite consideration of the sacred co-existence of wild mystery and home. They invite the reader to listen to the sacred, to themselves, and having listened, to speak hope from the perspective of faith deeply lived. Between Introduction and Conclusion, *Outside Eden* is organized into three books: Patience, Practice and Prophecy.

The First Book includes six essays. Varied accounts from life, together with Short's demonstrated ability to enter thoroughly into wonder and wondering take the reader to life-places that are often all too familiar. "But here's the thing," Short says. "There's more." From a consideration of tears as an indicator of Christ's presence in the moment of human life, through the imperative of speaking joy to the world in spite of all you've seen, to thoughts about heaven and marriage and rising (the verb-form for resurrection), encouragement is the reader's treasure discovered in digging just a little deeper.

In the Second Book, four essays explore gratitude and happiness, transformation and tradition, onviviality, mission and home.

Three essays complete the Third Book. In "Wild Roses", the absence

of God (which we are reminded is an experience as old as the hills) is grappled with honestly. It concludes with three things a person can do, all the while knowing that it's more about the faith keeping you than you keeping the faith.

In the essay "Dear George" (a letter-report from the 38th of the United Church's Moderators to its first), Short writes, "This letter is written from my heart and bound for yours, whatever the address. Words coming from the heart must be received by the heart." These words could stand equally as a blessing of that place where the writing is received and valued in the reading. In these sentences, we glimpse the deep intimacy to which Short's words draw us. "Conversations" and connections are born from such intimacy.

Later in the same essay, he shares his heart-yearning that The United Church of Canada will be respected not for what we say but for what we are. Oh yes!

In this review's brief

conversation about Peter Short's work in *Outside Eden*, might I say that I began the reading with appreciation for the author's use of language. By the end of the book it became clear to me that Peter Short deserves respect both for what he says and for who he is — a faithful encourager in our Gospel work of healing and sustenance.

In the pages of his book I found perspective and encouragement for my work in the church, ideas for reflection and discussion, honesty, respect, wisdom, and inspiration to write. I also found challenge. That is good, because I believe the best of encouragement comes with challenge.

A flurry of page markers and margin notes are signals that I will return many times to these conversations with life in the faith — a life which Peter Short reminds us we live in God's wild and creative compassion — with a God who is more than in the building. Our "God is in the kitchen stirring the pot" (p 86).

– Marjorie Kent