

How do I, as a member of a peace church, respond to my government's demand for me to register for a possible war? I read Jesus' words on peacemaking and nonviolent resistance as well as Mennonite teaching on peacemaking. I also attended a discernment meeting of 400 youth and church leaders to discern how we can respond to the draft registration. At the gathering I stood up and addressed the gathering. 'We are gathered here because we are discerning how we are to respond to the draft registration. We believe that killing is wrong. But peacemaking is more than saying no to picking up a gun. Peacemaking is a way of life. There are many ways to kill people. Laws, trade policies, the logic of economics and technological change can also kill people and cultures. It may take a little longer but the results are the same.' Did my words have any impact on the gathering? Probably not. But it changed me because I was making connections with what I professed to be true and my own lived experience. Even though I never wanted anything more than to be a farmer and remain in my family, my community, and my church I decided to leave it all to follow my conscience and my desire to be a peacemaker. Was I afraid? Well, yes I was but I recalled the words of Jesus, "seek first the kingdom of God, a world in which all people, all creation and all institutions which we are a part of, live to serve the needs of others, and then all of the things that you need will be given to you. In other words live a life of service to others for the sake of God and all the things we need to live will be provided. In the midst of the thought of leaving everything that was familiar, I was at peace.

I loaded up my belongings and I headed off to Canada to study Mennonite church history and biblical peacemaking. It was a wonderful adventure—for 6 days. My mother phoned me and told me my brother had just died in a car crash. I left school and went home to help my father with the corn harvest. My father had been upset with me when I told him in the summer that I would be leaving to go back to school. He didn't know how the corn harvest would get done. Little did he know, nor I for that matter, that it would be me who would be helping with the corn harvest and not my brother. I had told my brother that he could take over the farm and I would leave for school but as the harvest was nearing its completion my parents told me that I could take over the farm. I said no. I had already chosen my path and I was going to continue.

I had great teachers at the small college I attended. One of my teachers knew of my great love of farming and introduced me to a book about the importance of land in the Bible. I loved that book and it was through this influence that I began to make connections with Biblical peacemaking and agriculture. It was a topic then

that not many people had even considered but it became for me my vocation, my calling in life.

Although I had a clear sense that I wanted to learn more about peacemaking, the reality of academic life was difficult. I had to have a dictionary beside me so that I could understand words I had never seen before growing up on a farm and studying agriculture. It was hard. Over the years I learned a lot but I longed for these 'words to become flesh', I wanted to find a way of living the words that I talked about. I didn't think I could do that by being an academic or by living in the city. So I lived a life of frustration. I talked a lot about what I hoped to do. I lamented that there were problems going on but I felt there was nothing I could do. I lived in the city and the city has nothing to do with farming. Or so I thought. But one day, I don't know how it happened, I realized that I don't have to remain stuck with my frustrations. Eating is a part of agriculture. If that is true, every time we put food into our mouth we are shaping a world of relationships and are dictating how the land is used.

In the late 1980's over 400,000 hectares of land were repossessed by the banks because farmers were unable to repay their loans. This happened not because of bad weather or the farmers being bad managers. It happened because of things totally out of the control of farmers like a big change in interest rates, new trade laws like NAFTA, and changes in US farm policy that resulted in large volumes of wheat being dumped into the world market driving down the price of wheat. In the small towns, people didn't want to talk about what was happening. But signs of the stress were everywhere. Farmers took out their frustrations by either abusing themselves through alcoholism or suicide. Or, they took out their frustrations by abusing their wives and children. Or, they tried to find someone else to blame for the trouble and stresses they were facing. The media everywhere was reporting on "the farm crisis" but nowhere was anyone actually helping people to understand why it exists and what can be done to shift the conversation to one of hope. For two years I had a job working with people in the cities and also rural communities to help people understand the present of a food system gone wrong. Why do food systems exist? They exist, Ayame chan, to feed people. But food systems need to do more than this if they are to last. They need to nurture our souls and they need to be the source of stories that we can tell our families and community so that the process of living and farming can continue for generations to come. Next time I will tell you some stories of what I did when I was in Canada to bring hope and change to people in Manitoba, Canada.