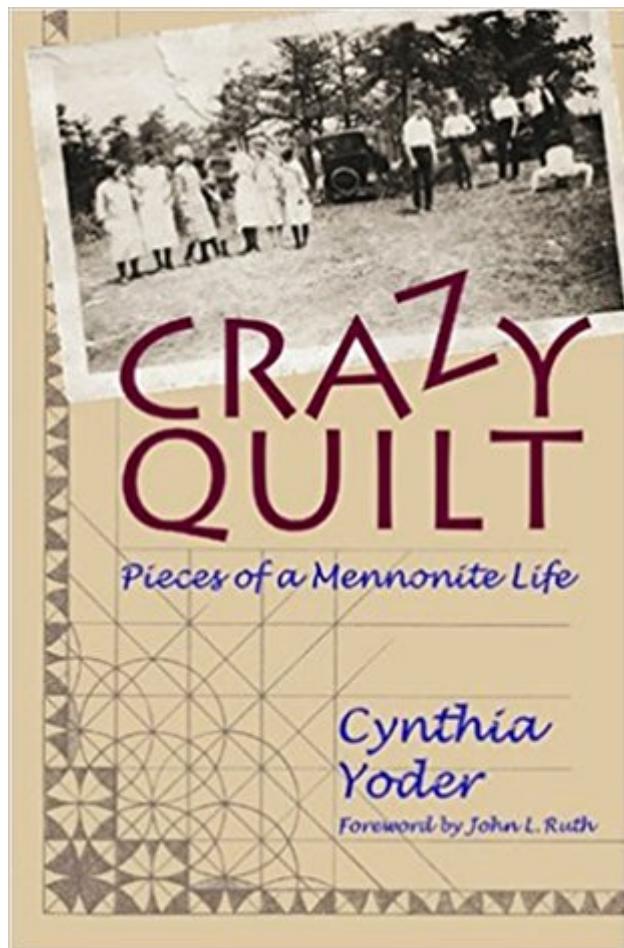


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Crazy Quilt: Pieces Of A Mennonite Life



Synopsis

At age twenty-six and grappling with depression, Cynthia leaves her husband of two years and their life in N.Y.C. to search for meaning that takes her back to her Mennonite roots. As she listens to her aging grandparents, Yoder understands what she needs to do to save herself and her marriage. (188pp. illus. Herald Press, 2003.)

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Customer Reviews

When the Manhattan-transplanted narrator of Cynthia Yoder's "Crazy Quilt" visits her family in rural Pennsylvania, her Mennonite grandmother laughs at her leather granny boots, purchased at a Soho boutique. The boots look remarkably like the old-fashioned gear the grandmother wore in her youth and was relieved to be rid of. But both women are delighted that "the somber style has been resurrected into something playful and worldly." That kind of makeover is exactly what the narrator hopes to achieve in her own life. A preacher's kid, the daughter of a Mennonite minister, she has earlier renounced much of her heritage and religious upbringing, fleeing to the city to live a Bohemian life. There, she marries a sexy ex-Mennonite rebel, who puts on eye make-up to go out dancing, and exchanges earrings with her in their commitment ceremony. Together, the couple tastes the 20th century pop culture pleasures of drag queen parties, Wild Turkey, The Cure, and open-mike poetry readings. But the narrator finds the American trick of self-reinvention hard to pull off. She remains haunted by her sense that it's her "responsibility to change the world." Her life is stalled by depression; her marriage disintegrates. Seeking a viable way to move forward, she looks

backward at the heritage she thought she'd thrown off. She returns to Pennsylvania, to interview her Mennonite grandparents for an oral history of her family -- in the process, conducting a rigorous self-examination of her identity, values and faith. Yoder's journaling and reflections on her life are effectively contrasted with a series of matter-of-fact diary entries made by her grandmother in the 1930s, a sort of Mennonite Day-Timer that offers up the day's labors to God.

In my opinion, what makes a book truly worth reading is the providing of not just an interesting read but also an important lesson. In the memoir *Crazy Quilt*, Cynthia Yoder gives great insight into the life of dedicated members of the Mennonite community as well as advice that everyone can use. Although her own story may have a fuzzy background and an uncertain ending, her readers are taken on a journey as they follow the author's search for identity and an ideal future. Cynthia was born into a family whose lifestyle defines the Mennonite lifestyle. With her father being a Mennonite priest and holding their community's church services in her own home, Cynthia is expected to live the pure life of a priest's daughter. However, even though she has a love for God at the time, Cynthia longs for a more worldly life as is lived by her friends. Throughout her childhood and teen years, there's a continuous internal struggle between her church-going, modest-clothes self and her rock n' roll, movie-going self. As Cynthia ages into her 20s, her faith in God withers to become practically non-existent. With a combination of loss of direction for her life and trouble maintaining a love-bond with her husband, she falls into a pit of depression. At times, she even believes she sees materialized forms of her depression and sinister faces in inanimate objects, causing her to question her own sanity. In an attempt to gain direction for her life, Cynthia moves out of her New York apartment to stay with her devoted Mennonite grandparents while her husband, in order to give her space, travels extensively in Europe. While staying at her grandparents' house where she has fond memories visiting as a child, Cynthia conducts oral interviews with her grandparents to learn their life story.

The memoir which I read was called *Crazy Quilt: Pieces of a Mennonite Life* by Cynthia Yoder. It describes how Cynthia attempts to address her mental health problems through her visit with her Mennonite family. I feel that the author uses vivid language to express her internal feelings. Though the organization of this memoir was creative, it was hard to follow. Overall, I feel that this is a good memoir to provide direction for readers who feel abandoned by God. At the beginning of the memoir, Cynthia begins to have some mental problems while living with her husband, Jonathan, in New York. Cynthia says, "During the three years I'd been living in New York since college, I'd accepted a

low-grade emotional burn as a normal part of getting through the day" (Yoder 13). Cynthia feels emptiness inside her soul and body and has some delusions which complicate her work, life, and marriage. Therefore, she decides to go back home and collect stories from her Pennsylvania Dutch Mennonite family. She says, "Maybe I would learn something I'd forgotten, or a thing not learned well enough the first time around." She hopes that she can start over again by living with her family" (Yoder 17). After going back to the place where she was born and grew up, Cynthia begins to figure out what kind of life she wants and learned how to live her life happily and freely. When she was young, Cynthia always felt isolated from her schoolmates and as an adult she feels separated from the culture around her because of the strict rules enforced by her Mennonite family. Cynthia's loneliness and feelings of isolation are evident when she says, "My friends, my neighborhood playmates, almost everyone I related to as a child was 'the world'-the people I supposedly was separate from" (Yoder 22).

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