



# Mended Martyrdom

Maggie Wiebe

University of Michigan  
Stamps School of Art & Design  
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## Project Statement

The ideal of self sacrifice for the sake of others has always been a central tenant to my understanding of Mennonite beliefs; the focus has always been on selflessness, and never on the families and communities left behind by those that martyr themselves. My own family has a long history of working in human service jobs, and though I am proud of this, I've also realized the unacknowledged toll this nonstop giving has on those around me.

At what point does the Mennonite tradition of martyrdom become counterproductive? These works attempt to answer that question by embracing and exaggerating the labor and self sacrifice that is inherent to traditional Mennonite fiber arts. For each piece, a personal article of clothing (a pair of pants, a sweater) is used to create a new textile that is then used to serve others (a quilt, a towel) and in the process renders the original garment unusable.



Installation view of *Mending Martyrdom*



## Robbing Peter to Pay Paul (Robbing Papa to Provide Protection)

**Cotton (my dad's pants, my brother's shirt, my pants), linen (my mom's shirt, my aunt's pants), cotton batting, cotton thread**

The Mennonite tradition of quilting is rooted in comfort and providing for others. Quilting is traditionally a community based craft, structured around church quilting groups where women contribute to many of their friends' quilts. By utilizing and referencing quilting practices to think about the highly individualistic nature of martyrdom and the discomfort that comes with it, this work questions our relationship with service and care for the self.

Using a pair of my dad's pants I cut, patched, and recut pieces for the quilting pattern Robbing Peter to Pay Paul, filling in the rest of the pattern with pieces cut from my family's clothing. Over the course of this process, both the pants and the quilt gradually lost their intended structure, leaving a record of the harm that comes when you give more than you have to offer.



Close up of the quilt from *Robbing Peter to Pay Paul (Robbing Papa to Provide Protection)*



My dad's pants, which I cut, patched and recut to create the pattern in the quilt.



Quilt made of my family's repurposed clothing that has been cut, patched, and cut again.



# Will you let me be your servant?

Single channel video, linen, rayon, flax tow, acrylic

Within the Mennonite community, footwashing has long been held as a symbol of service. In this piece, I translated the words of the hymn Will you let me be your servant into a pattern, woven using material that I ripped, cut, and unraveled from my sweater. The woven towel is then used as part of a footwashing ceremony.

The full video can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BNqOX54IYrw>



Stills from the video *Will you let me be your servant?*



Installation view of the video and woven towel



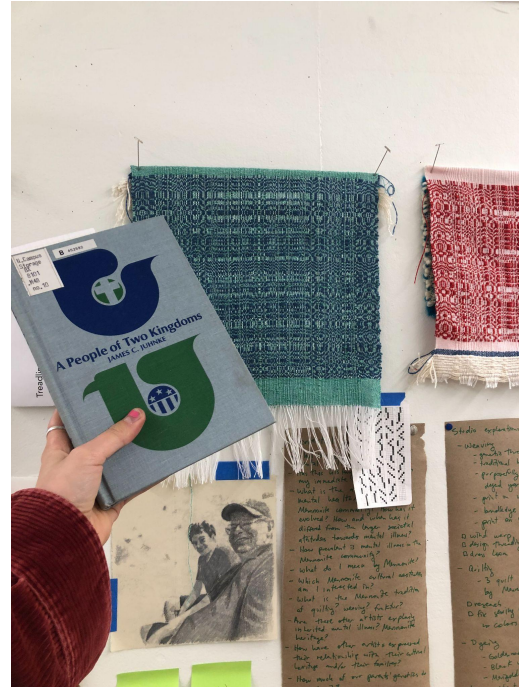
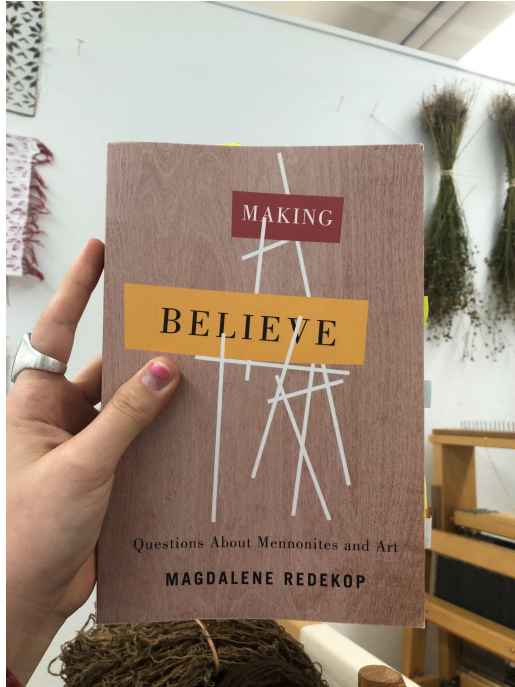


Installation close up



Woven towel close up

# Research & Process



## Who are the Mennonites?

Before I dive into my research for this project, I want to give a brief overview of who the Mennonites are. Most people know very little about Mennonites, and usually confuse them with the Amish. Though there are similarities (especially among more conservative groups) Mennonites are more likely to live as part of society and as a result are active in advocating for peace and reconciliation

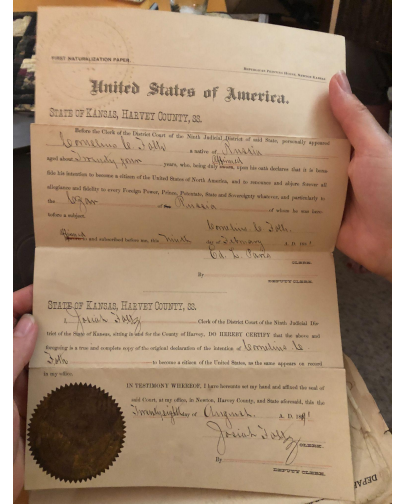
The Mennonite Church traces its roots back to the Anabaptist movement of the Reformation. The Anabaptists believed that baptism should be reserved only for adults that could express that they wanted to dedicate their life to Christ, instead of the infant baptism that was the norm. This belief resulted in extreme persecution by the Catholic Church. Nowadays, adult baptism is widely accepted, and what sets Mennonites apart from other Christian denominations is steadfast commitment to community and to reconciliation, which is deeply rooted in pacifism.



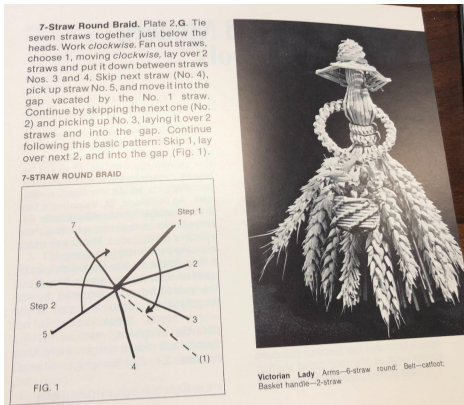
# My Mennonite Ancestry

I started my research by learning about the history of the Mennonite group my family belongs to. My ancestors were Dutch Mennonites, who immigrated to the Russian Empire by way of Prussia. In Russia, they were granted farm land and exemption from military service by Catherine the Great, in exchange for colonizing the newly created region of New Russia (modern day Southern Ukraine).

With the end of this exemption in the late 1800s, they started immigrating to the United States. My family moved to Kansas, where the railroads were selling land they had taken by forcibly removing the Plains tribes, including the Kiowa, the Kansas, and the Osages (Wiebe Snakebirds 213).



My great great great grandpa's naturalization papers



Wheat weaving instructions

This research gave me a more concrete grasp on the stories I've been told my whole life, and I realized the extent that immigration and the relationship to land has impacted Mennonite history and culture.

This was especially true when learning about hard red winter wheat, a strain of wheat brought to the United States by Russian Mennonites that quickly became the largest crop in Kansas. The Mennonite attachment to where we came from and who came before us. Exemplified by wheat weaving that was once a popular art form among Kansas Mennonites, where winter wheat is braided into elaborate decorations.

# Art in Relation to Land

In response to my research into my ancestors history and relationship with the land, I began exploring how I could incorporate the natural landscape into my work. I started by foraging for plants to use as natural dyes, and spent time working with both native plants (like goldenrod and black walnut) as well as invasive plants (like pokeberry and marigolds). I also learned about more traditionally used dye plants, like indigo and madder root.



Process of foraging, drying, and processing pokeberry and goldenrod for dye



Cotton, wool and silk dyed with goldenrod, pokeberry, indigo, marigold, and black walnut



# Mennonite Weaving

In addition to learning about Mennonite wheat weaving, I began learning about broader Mennonite weaving practices. The Russian Mennonites my family comes from don't have a strong weaving tradition. However, when the Swiss and German Mennonites immigrated to the United States in the late 1600s they brought their weaving with them.

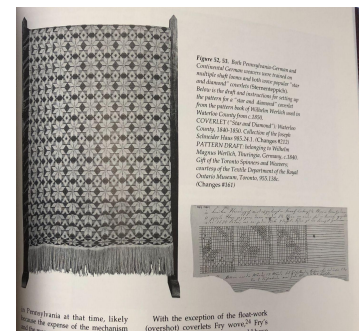
I visited the Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society and the Mennonite Heritage Center, and learned about the role Mennonites played in the development of early American textile traditions. I also learned about the patterning and techniques used, the process of growing and spinning linen, and spinning and dyeing wool yarn. Overshot weaving is a technique that was commonly used that allows for larger and more complex patterning. Traditionally, this was done with a linen warp and plain weave weft, and a colored wool weft used for the pattern.



Unspun flax and a linen spinning wheel from the Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society



Above: Close up of a woven overshoot coverlet from the Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society



Right: Various historical weaving patterns attributed to Pennsylvania Dutch Mennonites



# Flax to Linen

As part of the pilot Dye and Papermaking garden at the Campus Farm, I had the opportunity to grow, harvest, and process flax into linen, using a similar process used by the Mennonite weavers I was reading about.



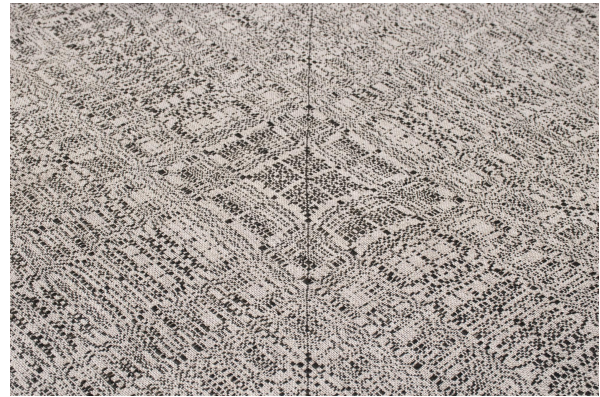
Process of growing, harvesting, drying, deseeding, retting, breaking, scutching, and combing flax fibers



# Weaving DNA

When I started this project, I thought I was going to end up making work about inherited mental illness within my family using Mennonite crafts. Several of my close family members have struggled with psychosis, schizophrenia, and depression, and I was interested in exploring this inheritance using the fiber crafts I've inherited from my Mennonite family.

As I started looking into the genetics of schizophrenia and psychosis, I came across this piece by Danielle Burke, called *Linum usitatissimum*. For this piece, Burke transcribed the DNA of flax into an overshoot weaving pattern, using a gene “associated with flax’s resiliency during drought and environmental stress”. This link between genetics and the traditional weaving technique of overshoot was eye opening, and I decided to try it myself.



*Linum usitatissimum*, 2017, natural & deconstructed linen, 47” x 45”

Using a piece of a gene associated with schizophrenia, the SETD1A gene, I created my own overshoot weaving pattern by assigning each protein of DNA to a harness on my loom. The weaving below is woven as it's threaded, meaning the pattern is repeated horizontally and vertically.

Exons	SETD1A exons	All exons in this region
		TTGGCATGTGA
		GTGGATCCAG
		FTCTCCTGTTG
		TCCACACAGG
		TCAGTTCTGT
		GGATCTGGGCTGAGGCAAGGGGCTGTGTTCCTGGGGGTTCTCGGGGAGATGGG
		GGAGGACACAGCCTGTGGTCAAGGGGCGAGGGTGGCTGAGCCTGGGTCTCCCTGAC
		CTCTTTCTCTCTATATGTCTCTCTCCCAAGCCACGGAGAGGTACCCCCCAAGTGGG
		CCCTTGGGCCCCAGAGCACTCTCTGGGCCCCGGCCCTGCCCCAGCCCGGATGAG
		CGTCCCTCTCTCCCACTCCCTCTCTGCCCCACCAAGAAAGCCCGAAACTGTCTCT
		TTCTCTGCATCGAGTGGTGGCAGCCCGGAGCCCTCCAGCCACCGCGCAGGCC
		AAGTTCCCGCCAGCCTCCCGAAGGCTCCCGGGGCTGGAGCGACCATCCGCAAC
		CTGCCCTGGACACGCACTCTGGTCAAGGTGGCCCGAGAGGTGTCCCGAGGAGGG
		CGAGCCGGCTGGAGCCGAGCCCTCTCAAGGAAAGAGGGGCTGAGCCAGCCAGCA
		GAGTGAACCTGGGCTCTGGCCGACCTGGCCCTGACCCCTCCCGCGCGGCTGCCCT
		GGCCTGCTGTGTAAGACTCAGAGGCCACAGAGCATGGAGAGGCCAGGCGCCCT
		AGGCCCTGCTCAGCCACATCTCTGGAGCAACTATGCCCTGGCCCTAAGCCCAAG
		CCCCCTGGCCAGCCCTGGGCCCCGGGAGCAGTGGCCGACCCGCGCCCTCTTCAGT
		TCCCACTGATGAGGCTCTGGAGCCCGGAGGGTGGTGGTGGGGGAGAGCCGC
		AAGCCGAGCAACTGCAGCAGGGGGAGAGGGCCAAAGAGAGGGGGAGAGAGGGG
		GAGGAGAGGGAGGAGTCTCTCTGACAGCAGCAGCAGCATGGGAGGGGGCCCTC
		CGAGGGGAGCCTCCGCTCCACGCCCGGGCCCGCCCTCCGCCCCACCCCGGGG
		CCAGCCCGCCCTGAGAGCCAGTGGATTTAACAAGATGAACAATCTGTATGAC
		ATTGGAACCTGGGCTGGACTCAGAGGACATAGTACTCGCTTACCTGACAGAGGG
		CTCTGAGCAGACAAGCGGGCTGACTGGCTCAGCAGACTCACTGGTCTCATCAGCA
		AATACTGAGTGTGGGGCCCTCCCGGGCTGGGTCTCCCGGACCCCTCAGGCA
		CCGTGATCTGCCCCACTCTGTGGCTCCCTCTGGTCCCAAGCACTTTCTCTCCG
		TCTGTCCCTTTCTTCTGCTTCCAGCAATTTCTGGAGGACGATGGGGCTGGGGCT
		TCTCCCTCTCCCTACCTGGTATGCTCAGGGGGGGGGCCCGCCCTCTCCCTTGGG
		TGGAGCAGGTGGCCAGAGGAGCGGCTCTCTCTTAAACCCCTGACCTCAACCA
		TGACCACCCAAAGCCAAAGCGGGCCCCAGATGGCCCCGGGAGACACAGCAGGCT
		CAGCCCGCAGGAGGCTACTACCCCACTAGCAAGAGAGGAGGACAGTACTGGGAGG
		TGTGGCAGTCTGGGCGGCGCTGGAGGGCTGGACACTAGCTGGCTTAAAGCCG
		GGCCGGCTCTCTGGCACTACTCTCCCTGGCTGCTCACTCTCCCTGGCTGTGTCT
		CACAAGGAGCAAGCCGCTCTCTCCAGGCGGGCTCGAGCAGGGGGGCTGCTGAGGG
		CCATGGGTACTCCGCACTATGACAGTGAACCTGCTGAACTCAACAGCTCAGGTAA
		GGCTGGCTCAAGAGGGCTGGTGGGTGGGTGGGAGCAGAGAGGGGACAGGACAGG
		GGACCACTCAGAGCTCTCTGGTCTCTGGTGGGAGTGGGGGTAGAGGCTCAGAA
		CACCTCTGCCAGAACTCTGTGGAGAGTGAAGGTCTGGGTGTGGAGGTGTCTGG
		CAGTGGTCTCCCTCTGCCCCAGTTCCGAGAGAGCTCCGATTTGCCCGGAGC
		CGGATCCAGAGTGGGCTGTGTTCCTATGGAACCAATCTGCTGACGAGATGTCTATC
		GAATAGGGGTCAAGCACTCCGCTGAGTGGGCTGGACTTCCAGCCCGCCGGCTTC
		TGATGACAGCAGCATGGGGCTCAGACAGTGTCTTTTCCGGTAAAGCCTTCC

Portion of the SETD1A gene



DNA weaving

# Weaving Hymns

At this point I was thinking about how both my relationship with mental illness and my relationship with Mennonite culture are tied to my dad and paternal grandparents. As a way of exploring these relationships, I started making weavings combining the gene associated with schizophrenia and Mennonite hymns.

Using the same threading for the gene, I wove the hymn “Praise God from Whom all Blessings Flow” which is one of the most significant Mennonite hymns. In practice, this means the vertical parts of the weavings were determined by the gene sequence, and the horizontal parts were determined by the hymn.

On the left is a weaving of “Praise God from Whom all Blessings Flow” made using the lyrics of the song, and on the right is a weaving using the notes of the song.

SERVICE MUSIC  
606 Praise God, from Whom  
All Blessings Flow  
Doxology

Praise God, from whom all bless-ings flow; praise 'him, all crea-tures  
here be-low; praise 'him a-bove, ye heaven-ly host; praise  
Fa-ther, Son, and Ho-ly Ghost. A-men.

*\*Or "God"*

TEXT: Thomas Ken, 1605, 1709  
MUSIC: Genevan Psalter, 1551

OLD HUNDREDETH  
LM



Woven lyrics



Woven tune



## Two Breakthroughs

As I was thinking about the connection between mental illness and Mennonite culture within my family, I started to wonder if there was any connection within the wider Mennonite community. Mennonite conscientious objectors during WWII served in mental institutions, which led to the creation of eight Mennonite mental institutions after the end of the war. I did a lot more research into Mennonites and mental health care reform, and though I didn't end up using it in my final project, it led me to two major breakthroughs.

The first breakthrough had to do with quilts. Over fall break I went to visit my mom's dad in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. He isn't Mennonite, but he has several friends that are, one of whom used to work at a Mennonite assisted living facility and had some familiarity with mental illness among Mennonites. When I explained my project to him and his wife, he immediately remembered a quilt he had seen 10 years earlier, at one of the facilities he had worked at. Before I knew what was happening, we were in the car, trying to reach the retirement home in the 20 minutes before it closed for the evening. When we got there, my grandpa's convinced the women at the front desk to let us in, and we ran through the building until we found the quilt, hanging exactly where he remembered it.



*Memory Loss, Anna Mary Burkholder*

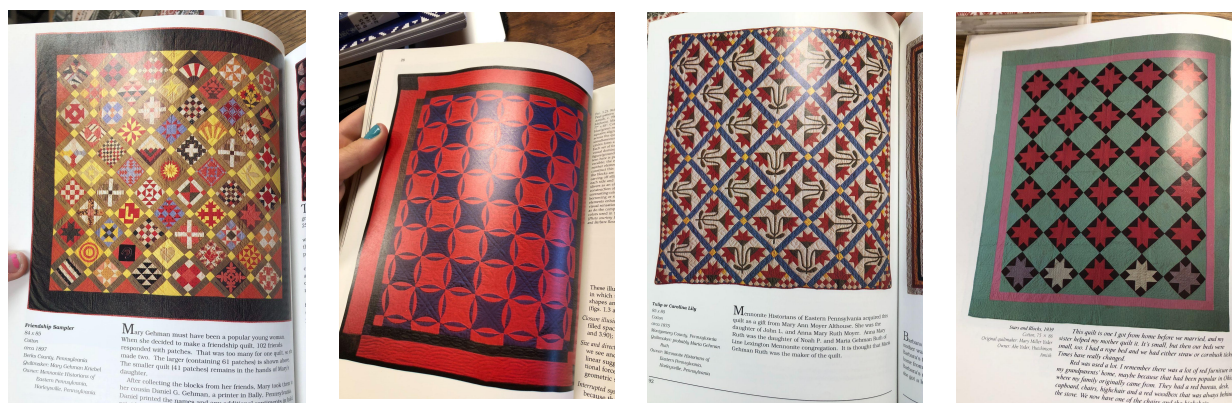
The quilt is titled *Memory Loss* and was made by Anna Mary Burkholder, to visualize the progression of Alzheimer's. It's an incredibly simple quilt, but by breaking the familiar Ohio Star quilt pattern, it makes a striking point. As much as the quilt itself stuck with me, it was the impact the quilt had on my grandpa's friend that I kept thinking about. Seeing such a familiar, heartbreaking experience in a quilt - something that can be found in every Mennonite household - stuck with him for 10 years.

The second breakthrough was about martyrdom. Learning about conscientious objectors and all their sacrifices made me think about the Mennonite tradition of martyrdom. The amount of hardship the conscientious objectors went through, and the impact it had on their ability to carry out their jobs and go about their lives reminded me both of the martyr stories I heard growing up and of my dad.

# Mennonite Quilting

Growing up, quilts were everywhere. Every room in our house has at least one quilt, either hanging on the wall, over the back of the couch, or piled on the bed to fight the Minnesota cold. Every year for as long as I can remember we would go to the Mennonite Central Committee's relief sale, where women from my church would donate quilts to be auctioned off for disaster relief. It took until this project for me to recognize how important quilts are Mennonite culture, and how much weight and history they hold.

Aesthetically, Mennonite quilting isn't very far removed from mainstream American quilting, but what sets it apart is the culture around quilting. Quilts are almost always made as gifts, usually for family members, to be given at weddings or to children and grandchildren. The best, most beautiful, most time consuming quilts are almost always given away, and never kept by the quilter. I've heard from several people that when gifted a beautiful quilt, they would never use it on their own bed, but save it for the guest bed.



Images from "A Treasury of Mennonite Quilts"

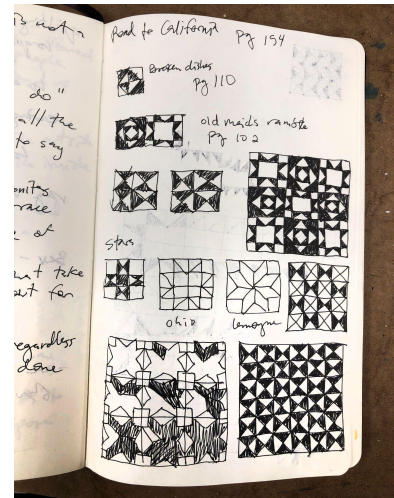
The book "A Treasury of Mennonite Quilts" had a big influence on how I thought about my project. This book is a collection of Mennonite quilts from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many of them are also accompanied by short stories about the quilter or the occasion for which they were made. Being able to read about the stories behind each quilt and how important family and community were to many quilts was pivotal in my project. Though it isn't an exhaustive compilation of Mennonite quilts, it provides a good overview of the patterns and uses of quilts in the Mennonite community across the United States.



# Quilt Experiments



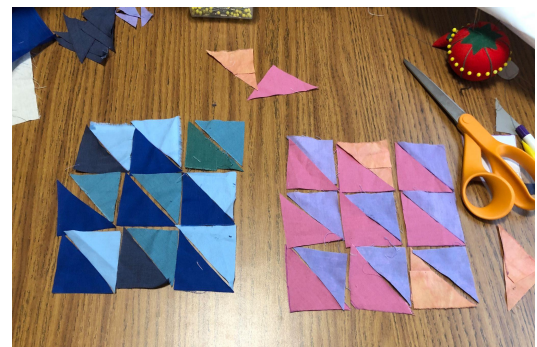
Experimenting with scraps, thinking about color, shape, repetition, and scale



Copies of quilt patterns, working to understand how they are built



Learning how to applique different shapes and angles



Playing with piecing and hand sewing while in quarantine

# Mennonites and Martyrdom

The history of persecution by the Catholic Church and the idolization of martyrdom it created has remained an important part of Mennonite culture. Many of these stories of persecution are preserved in the *Martyrs Mirror*, a book that traces the tradition of martyrdom from the time of Christ, and includes the stories of martyrdom from the time of Christ to 1500, and stories of over 800 Anabaptist martyrs executed for their beliefs during the Reformation. The stories tend to focus as much or more on the deaths of the Anabaptists, rather than the beliefs and actions that got them executed.

Though it was published during the 17th century, it is still widely read. In my parents and grandparents' generations this book was often read on Sunday nights, and it is still cited as something to live up to in the Mennonite community. We never read this book in my house, but stories from it featured prominently in my upbringing. The most important of these is the story of Dirk Willems, a Dutch Anabaptist that escaped from prison. As he was running away, one of his jailers followed him across a frozen lake and fell through. Instead of escaping, Willems went back and rescued his jailer, and was subsequently caught and burned at the stake. This story has been uplifted as an example of the selflessness that Mennonites should strive for.



Dirk Willemsz. 1569.

Illustration by Jan Luyken from the 1685 edition of *Martyrs Mirror*



Original from the 1685 edition of *Martyrs Mirror*

Magist. 1569

Copy of the Dirk Willems illustration I made for a relief sale in 2014



## Personal Relationship with Martyrdom

Growing up, the mythology of the martyrs and the dedication to service were both large parts of my experience in the Mennonite church. My own family has a long history of working in human service jobs, like nursing, social work, and extensive work with immigrants and refugees. I am incredibly proud of this legacy, but I've also realized the often unacknowledged toll this nonstop giving has on those around me.

This tradition of working tirelessly for others, but not taking time for oneself was passed on to my dad. As an immigration lawyer, he worked for years with refugees and victims of torture to help them gain asylum and prevent them from being deported. The stress and trauma of the job eventually became too much, and he spent a month in the hospital, and had to take several months off of work.



Laser engraved plexiglass intaglio print, 2021, 14" x 21"

I made this print following my dad's hospitalization, as I tried to come to terms with what had happened and how he had changed.

# Called to Be Snakebirds: Mennonite Historical Conditions as Inspiration for Peace Work

Virgil Wiebe, *From Suffering to Solidarity*, 2016, pp. 204–227.

Once I realized I wanted to work with martyrdom, I started looking for writing about Mennonites and martyrdom. The first thing I read was an article by my dad, titled “Called to Be Snakebirds: Mennonite Historical Conditions as Inspiration for Peace Work”. In the article, he reflects on how being a Mennonite impacted his career as an immigration lawyer and human rights advocate. Based on Matthew 10:16 “be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves,” he presents an abbreviated history of Mennonite activism, using the analogy of the snakebird, also known as the aninga. Snakebirds are both predators and prey, and using this comparison he is able to discuss the strengths and downfalls of Mennonite history.

He starts by telling the story of Dirk Willems and his execution. This leads to a discussion of the Mennonite relationship with martyrdom and persecution, where he explains our family’s history of migration from Russia and persecution by Communists. However, these stories of Mennonites as “prey” are only one side of the story, and he goes on to talk about the Native Americans that were forcibly removed from their land to make room for migrating Mennonites, and the role Ukranian Mennonites played in supporting the Nazis. He then goes on to make several more comparisons with snakebirds, including care for the young, congregating in kettles, commingling with other communities, and calls to conversion.

One section that particularly stood out to me was one about the constant conversion to self care that needs to take place in the immigration law community to combat secondary trauma, burnout, and compassion fatigue. This is striking to read now, after watching my dad struggle for the last two years with his mental health. I’ve had many similar discussions with him and my mom over the last two years, but it's weird to read these words from 2012 and know that even though he understood the difficulties and dangers of his job, it wasn’t enough to stop his mental health decline.

This article helped me come to terms with the ways negative and positive aspects of Mennonite culture coexist, and how they have impacted my family. It helped me realize that I want to focus on the spaces where Mennonites exist as both predator and prey, especially thinking about the complexities of martyrdom and the dissonance we seem to have between care for oneself and care for others.



# **Staying Alive: How Martyrdom Made Me a Warrior**

**Stephanie Krehbiel, Mennonite Life, vol. 61, no. 4, Dec. 2006**

After reading my dad's article, and realizing how much the stories of martyrdom and culture of selflessness have impacted those around me, I went looking for others that have struggled and questioned these aspects of Mennonite culture. The most impactful writing I found was the personal essay "Staying Alive: How Martyrdom Made Me a Warrior" by Stephanie Krehbiel. In this essay Krehbiel talks about her own journey with the idea of martyrdom. For her, the constant exposure to martyr stories, especially those in the Martyrs' Mirror, resulted in a kind of victim complex, that made her feel that by dedicating her life to helping others she was setting up herself and those around her to be hurt. She discusses how many of the men and women in Martyrs Mirror are described as courageously accepting their forthcoming executions, and at times even seeming joyous as they approach their tortured deaths. Krehbiel points out how unrealistic this is, by overlooking the fear, doubt, and complication that must have been felt by every martyr.

The unrealistic expectation that sacrificing for what you believe in is necessary does a disservice to those currently involved in peacebuilding or service jobs, which are often scary, confusing, and hard, even if you believe what you are doing is right. It doesn't leave much room to struggle or ask for help from others. She makes the point that many of the Mennonite martyr stories we tell have come to focus on death and dying, instead of on the Anabaptist values that Mennonites profess to uplift.

This way of understanding of the world became unsustainable for her, and she soon realized that she needed to find a different framework to approach her work and life. Instead of the martyr role model, she started looking towards the warrior model. For her, being a warrior is about action and resistance, with death as a possible consequence, but not the goal. There is also room in the warrior archetype for the gray area that is the reality of being human, of being both the victim, the protector and the perpetrator. However, while this may work for Krehbiel, most Mennonites won't be comfortable with accepting the idea of warriors as something to live up to.

This essay was eye opening for me in a lot of ways. Krehbiel manages to put into words what I have been feeling for the last few years, and the challenges she experiences while trying to live with the martyr ideals are things I've seen my dad struggle with. This helped solidify my desire to work with the idea of martyrdom.

# Jennifer Bornstein

## *New Rubbing and Psychological Tests, 2015*



Images of *New Rubbing and Psychological Tests, 2015*

At the same time I was reading about Mennonites and martyrdom, I was also looking at the work of Jennifer Bornstein. In her piece *New Rubbing and Psychological Tests*, Bornstein has taken an inventory of her father's belongings after he passed away. The drawings are made by taking manual rubbings of his belongings using blue encaustic paint. The resulting images capture the textures of objects, and the nature of the rubbings makes some of the drawings resemble x-rays. She described this work as a way of thinking about her dad's legacy, by examining the physical belongings he left behind.

Though Bornstein made rubbings of a large variety of his belongings, the drawings of his clothes are what I am drawn to. The detail that comes through of the creases and folds in his clothes feel very intimate, and conveys how much Bornstein cares about her father. The detail of the work also feels like evidence of his life, and the change and wear and tear that occurs over time. As part of this project she also incorporates plaster sculptures in response to her dad's work as a collagen researcher. This resonated with me the first time I saw images of this series, because of how closely Bornstein's understanding of her dad is tied to his job.



## Process for *Robbing Peter to Pay Paul*

Thinking about the sacrifices my dad made, and where it fit into the context of Mennonite history, I started working on a quilt. Using the quilt pattern *Robbing Peter to Pay Paul*, I started cutting up my dad's pants, filling in the rest of the pattern with my clothes, my moms clothes, and my brothers clothes. I then hand patched the pants, again using my family's clothes.

This process came from the tradition of laborious Mennonite quilting and the ways Mennonite women would reuse old clothes, aprons, or feed sacks to make their quilts.





## Process for *Robbing Peter to Pay Paul*

As I was working on this, I was also thinking about the cyclical nature of overwork and burnout among human service workers, the ways we lean on the people around us, and the draw of contributing to something larger than yourself.

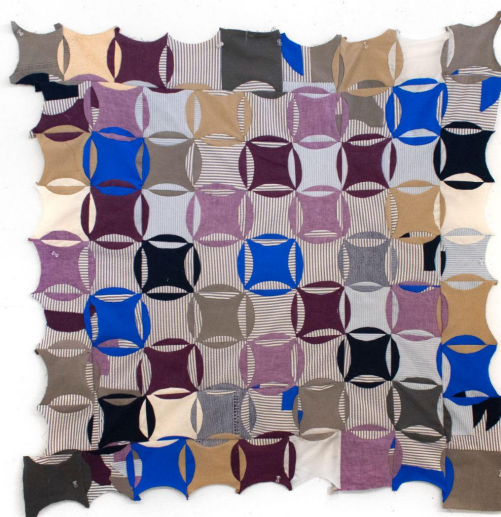
As the quilt got bigger, I started to break the pattern, mirroring the way the pants lost a bit of their integrity each time I cut and patched them.



Cutting into the pants a second time



Hand quilting the quilt after finishing piecing, appliqueing, basting, and backing.



The point where I started breaking the pattern



## Footwashing Research

As I worked on my quilt, I kept reading about the history of martyrdom and service in the Mennonite community. The tradition of footwashing is something that I got stuck on. It's a tradition that I strongly associate with my dad, who used to lead the footwashing services on Maundy Thursday.

Footwashing is a “one of the oldest religious rituals associated with Anabaptists,” (Brenneman 7) and comes from several stories in the Bible where Jesus washes the feet of his disciples, or has his feet washed by others. Growing up, the thing that always struck me about footwashing, and the reason I think my dad liked it, is that it places everyone on the same level. Pastors would wash members of their congregation's feet, parents would wash their children's feet, and then the favor would be returned. It is a physical, bodily way of serving someone else, and showing that you care for them. Washing someone's feet and having them wash yours is a very intimate and often uncomfortable act, which is probably why it has decreased in popularity the last several decades.



Still from the video *Will you let me be your servant?*

# Winnie Van Der Rijn

## *How to Dismantle the Patriarchy, 2021*

In her series *How to Dismantle the Patriarchy*, Winnie Van Der Rijn explores different ways of deconstructing men's collared shirts as a way to examine and reorient the structures of the patriarchy. Her attention to detail and the ingenuity with which she disassembles each shirt is what drew me to the work. In one piece, she removes everything but the seams; in another she removes everything but the stripes.



*How to Dismantle the Patriarchy, 2021*



In this piece from her Instagram, titled *XX/biological warfare/stratagems for dismantling the patriarchy*, Van Der Rijn again uses men's collared shirt. In this piece the shirt is transformed into a book, and stitches "instructions... in white amongst the xx" pattern of the shirt.

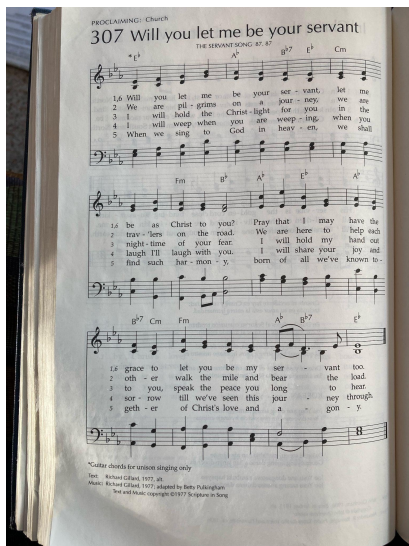
*XX/biological warfare/stratagems for dismantling the patriarchy, 2021*



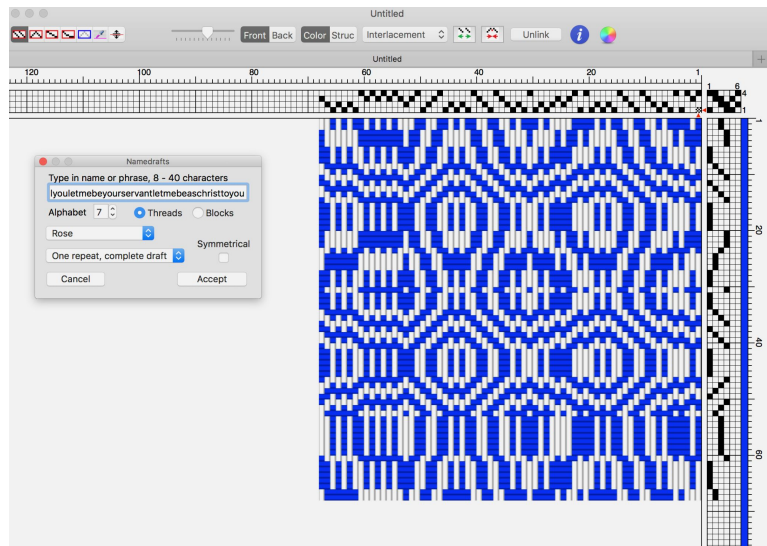
# Process for *Will you let me be your servant?*

Drawing inspiration from the work of Winnie Van Der Rijn and the tradition of footwashing, I started working on another piece. I was thinking a lot about how people that serve others are often opposed to accepting help for themselves. By making the ritual of footwashing into a one sided act, and taking from my own clothes to provide the service, I hoped to address this imbalance.

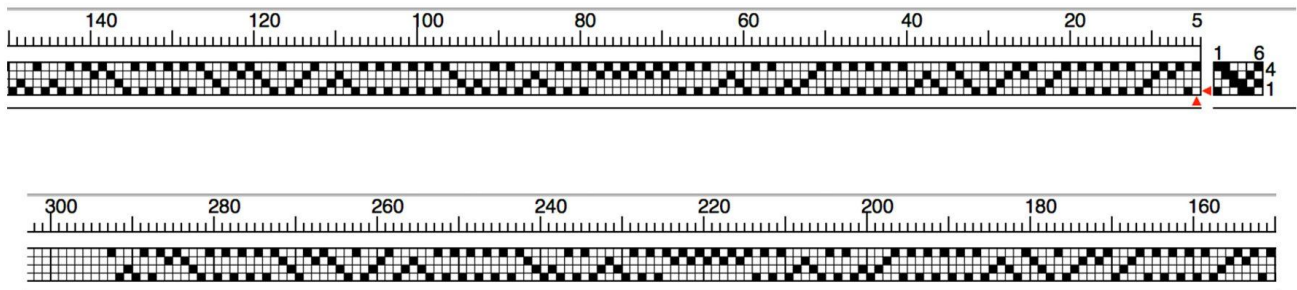
I started this piece by transcribing the lyrics of the hymn commonly used during footwashing, *Will you let me be your servant*, into a weaving pattern.



Hymn 307, *Will you let me be your servant*



Mockup of the pattern made using the hymns lyrics, using Fiberworks



Finished tie up for the final weaving pattern taken from the hymns lyrics

## Process for *Will you let me be your servant?*



For the weaving itself I used a white knitted sweater that I unraveled as I wove. The warp and plain weave weft was linen and rayon with flax tow, to tie back to traditional Mennonite weaving. I would have liked to use the flax I grew in the fall, but I didn't have access to a linen spinning wheel, or the time to learn to use one.

Process of filming the video



Towel on the loom



Finished towel



## Conclusion

This project drastically changed how I think about myself, my family, and what it means to be Mennonite. The connections I was able to make between my craft, my process, my family, and my own emotions is something that will inform my work in the future. I learned so much about my family's history and textile history, but there are many aspects of this project that I haven't finished exploring and want to continue working on. I plan to continue using art as a means of processing my emotions, and hope to continue exploring the relationship between place, textiles, and my family's history.



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