

Title

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Where my grandma's grandparents lived
they kept ice in the loft, packed in sawdust,
and on hot summer days the water dripped through,
just a little. The ice man came by
to replenish the ice box, and by the spring
the dark cooling hut kept the water cold.
That was life in the Great Depression.
"You were never poor, that's your problem."

When her grandfather went up to the ice loft
she knew what it meant, and how he'd churn
by the little stream like that in Hawkesville,
how he would work to bring forth a miracle
for her and her young siblings, hard workers
at school and in the neighbours' fields,
pulling potatoes for pennies, nipping cucumbers,
trading their Pensilfanni Deitsch for English
and stories of Heidi, or of Canada...
Like the girl who admonished her classmate,
"We are not human beings, we're Mennonites!"

One day her family became Gospel believers,
salvation by grace, and in high white fury
and then pleading and grief, her grandparents
fought all night with her proud humble father,
till by lamplight never to speak again they swore,
never to meet again, or cross the threshold of their door.

But the first time, out of the flaming sun
that filled the strawberries they picked,
the first time she was given ice cream
by her grandpa, she couldn't believe
anything that sweet, soft, and cold could exist,
it was so like heaven;

and years later, on the mission field,
the same was held by one Nepali woman
who tasted, and declared it burned her throat.

